

OTHER PEOPLE

A STORY
OF
MODERN
CHIVALRY

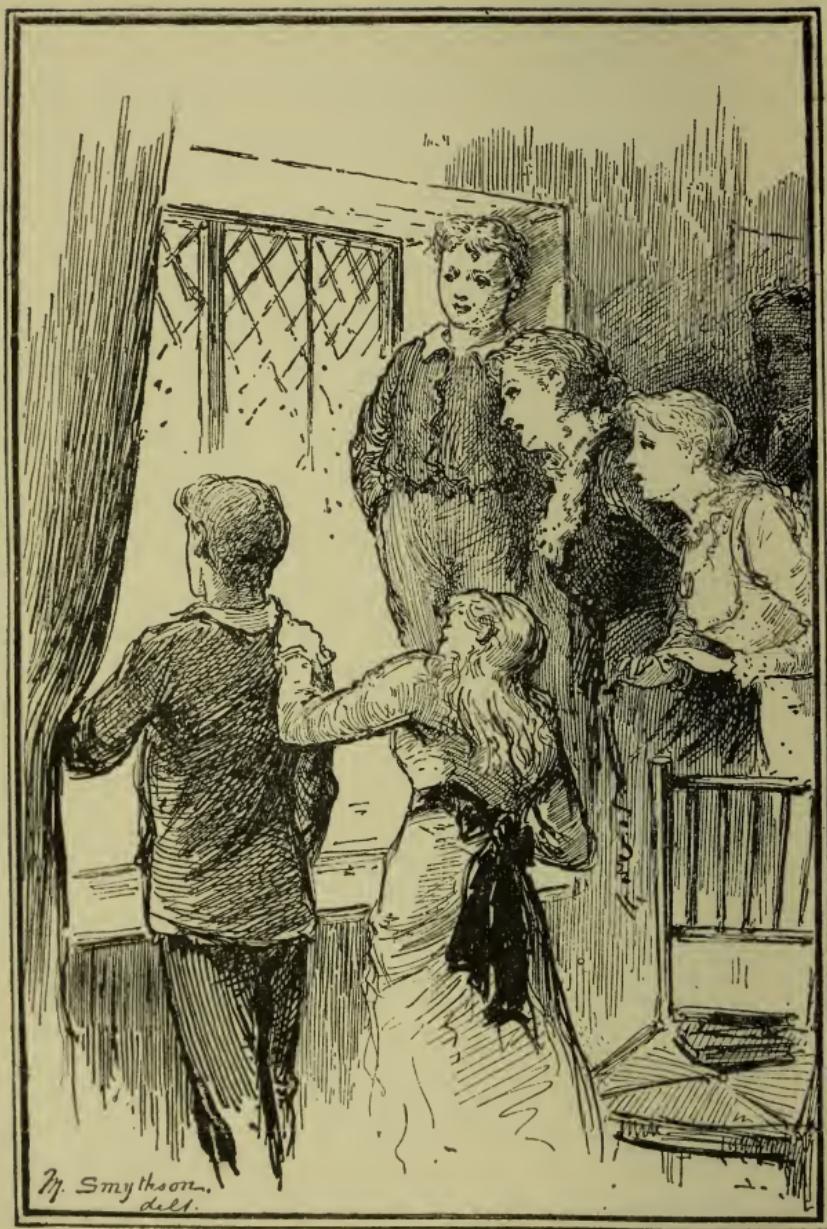
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AUSTIN





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OTHER PEOPLE.

A Story of Modern Chivalry.

BY

STELLA AUSTIN,

AUTHOR OF "STUMPS," "SOMEBODY," "RAGS AND TATTERS," "PAT,"
"OUR NEXT DOOR NEIGHBOUR," ETC.



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“The old Douglas motto, ‘Tender and True,’ may wisely be taken up again by all of us, for our own . . . an infinitude of tenderness is the chief gift and inheritance of all the truly great men.”—RUSKIN.

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TO

THE ONLY ONE

OF

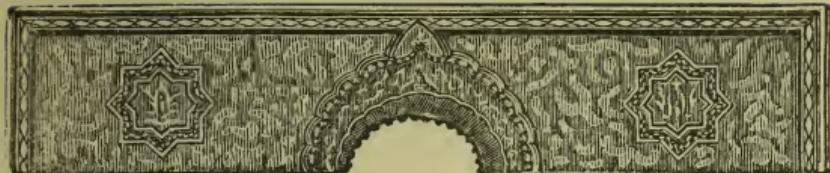
THE "OTHER PEOPLE"

WHO KNOWS THE OUTCOME OF THIS STORY,

I DEDICATE IT

WITH LOVE AND REVERENCE.

Ken Ray 2 Nov 53 Collected. Ado. - 12-18-53



REFLECTION.

AT the risk of being told that "qui s'excuse, s'accuse," I preface this story with a few words. I anticipate the objection that Ray's ideas, thoughts, and feelings, are too unlike those of boys of his age in general to have any claim upon the reader's credulity. As a rule, perhaps, they would be, but I have imagined an intensely sympathetic, sensitive, highly-strung nature, reared in a hot-house, which forced each of these characteristics into undue prominence while it stunted the growth of the more matter-of-fact, if less noble qualities. Some persons, the majority I think, remain soulless Undines to the end of their days. Some,

like Ray, find their souls full early, while others, like Forbes Dunbar, only wake up to the consciousness of them when the spring-time of their lives has long since passed away. Whether the knowledge brings happiness or unrest, I leave it to "other people," each for himself, or herself, to decide.

S. A.



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OTHER PEOPLE.

A Story of Modern Chivalry.

CHAPTER I.

THE OLD HOUSE BY THE RIVER.

“Anywhere, anywhere,
Out of the world.”

IN the heart of Gloucestershire, upon the top of a green hill, are seven tiny rivulets, called “The Seven Springs.”

Just at the commencement they are nothing more than a few crystal drops trickling through the red mould. They gradually widen and separate into seven silver strips, sparkling like threads

of light as they wind in and out among the fresh verdure, and through the red soil. Soon they diverge more widely, then lose sight of each other altogether, wander on their own seven different ways, and broaden into seven noble rivers. As they grow more expansive, they bear upon their smooth waters stately ships, until they themselves, in their turn, are carried off by the restless and resistless ocean.

One of these rivers finds his way into the midst of the great City of London, and when once within its shadows the light gradually dies out from his waters, and he wanders sluggishly and lazily on until, down towards the East, he lifts his much-stained face to look sadly into the still sadder faces of men, and women, and children who throng upon his banks. Is he sad, I wonder, because he remembers his innocent babyhood far away among the green hills, and his six fair companions, with whom he leaped and played in early youth? I think not. The smile has died from his lips, the

light gone from his eyes, because of the sin, and sorrow, and suffering through which he daily passes. Just as those who would live good lives and true must bear the burdens of the other people with whom they come in contact, even though by so doing they bring sad lines into their faces, which would not otherwise be there, and sad thoughts into their hearts. Father Thames knew full well, that when he entered into the midst of that busy city, he must be content to leave behind him the joyousness of childhood, the freshness of youth, and partake of the sorrow and suffering past which his path lies. That is why his step is slow and heavy ; his face soiled with the stain of many tears.

But it is when he is young and happy, many miles from the great city, that he enters into our story. On either side of him tall flags wave stately, scarce bending beneath the weight of the merry little water-wagtail, who balances himself upon them, to wink saucily at the silver trout and bream as they swim slowly to the surface. Forget-me-

notes and cuckoo plants hide themselves among the long grasses ; the yellow iris grows straightly in the midst of the water ; the aspens shiver as if an icy breath were always passing over them ; the willows droop their graceful branches, like Narcissus gazing perpetually at their own reflection ; and the silence is scarcely broken, save by the birds as they sing of love, or the steady splashing of a pair of sculls as a stray skiff shoots down mid-stream, and then makes a sudden dart to the side to avoid entanglement among the irises and flags which grow so freely and so tall.

Here stands the Old House by the River, with high walls to shut it in, and a door, overhung by creepers, heavy with iron bands and locks, by which to enter. The yellow stone house, not very picturesque in itself, but prettily situated, stands upon sloping ground, and behind it, still ascending, a small wood, in which copper beeches and light green firs abound, forms a graceful background.

In the house lived a gentleman named Geoffrey

Forrest, with his six sons and daughters. A complete set, as they often observed to each other, and not unique.

They were between the ages of eighteen and eight, and came as follows :—

Enid, aged eighteen.

Cecily, aged sixteen.

Raleigh, aged fifteen.

Hester, aged twelve.

Denys, aged eleven.

Miles, aged nine.

Mr. Forrest was what people in the neighbourhood termed odd, eccentric ; some even went further, and said he was rather mad. He was certainly a man of one idea, and this, unfortunately, an idea which very much affected his children and their lives. He had long since made up his mind that the present century was not the century in which he should have chosen to live, and as he could not put himself back into another age, he did the only thing possible under the circumstances, he deter-

mined to see as little of it as he could. His wife fell into his views, and ere they were married he bought the Old House by the River, remote then from town or railway. There his children were born, there his wife died, and there he had lived for nineteen years, seeing no one except upon the Sundays when they went to the little church which lay upon the other side of the wood. It was quite out of the world, this Old House by the River, and it suited Mr. Forrest as hardly another in England would have done. There he could dream in quiet of the days gone by, an Utopian dream, until he forgot that the nineteenth century was a practical reality ; one which his children certainly would have to face some time, and not where he would wish it to be, in the ages yet unborn. There too he tried to keep away from him, so far as lay in his power, aught that might shock his refinement, or jar upon his fastidious nature.

The Forrests were served by two faithful " retainers," as Mr. Forrest always called them, John

and Janet Burton. They were husband and wife ; both of them nearer sixty than fifty, and what the Forrests would have done without them they often wondered and openly said. John was gardener, butler, cook, valet, carpenter, in fact everything that a man could be, and a great deal more than most men are. Janet in her feminine capacity could do most things also. She was housekeeper, kept the family purse, and could scrub, and wash, and bake, and yet attend to the wardrobes of her young ladies. The Forrests were very poor, though in his early years their father had been comfortably off. But he had spent his capital in priceless china, quaint old furniture, and a few really good pictures. So that, though the Forrests could drink out of cups worth their weight in gold, and sit upon a chair in which a French king had sat, yet they wanted clothes often, almost as badly as the beggar children who played about in the streets. Janet, assisted by the girls themselves, cut up, patched, pieced, darned, mended, altered,

for though—it was the nineteenth century, people must be clothed, and struggle as they would they only just managed to keep themselves respectable, nothing more, but with that they were content.

Mr. Forrest taught his children himself, boys and girls together; but out of the six, Ray was the only one in any way like his father. Mr. Forrest had tried to instil into their minds his own ideas, but when he faced the truth, as sometimes he was forced to do, he was obliged to own that the five of them had plenty of common sense, but very little romance in their natures, unless indeed we except their devotion to their father, their unbounded belief in Ray, their brother.

For their father, each of them adored him, every hair upon his smooth dark head was precious in their eyes. For their brother Ray, ah! Who could help loving him, believing in him and expecting great things from him?

Ray inherited his father's cravings for the ideal and the beautiful, but with this difference. Mr.

Forrest was content to sit and dream of the great and noble deeds which had been done, and which could be done; but the boy was longing to put into practice his grand, chivalrous notions, yearning to go forth into the world and fight the battle of the right against the wrong; sighing for the time when he could take up the glove upon the behalf of the oppressed, the weak, the defenceless, sending his whole soul forth day after day, in a passionate wish that the time would come when he might take his part in the battle of life, and prove not altogether unworthy of his aspirations.

The father and son were much alike in face. Each had the same smooth, dark head, pale refined features, sweet, serious grey eyes. But Ray had a gift his father never possessed, the gift of music. Not the mere trick of playing and singing which belongs to the majority of people, but the rare gift of making music speak his own thoughts to the hearts of others. He could play Mendelssohn, Beethoven, Bach, Spohr; and he could

also weave his own fancies into melody. And when he felt that his longings were so powerful, that they brought with them unrest and disquiet, he would steal to the church, of which he had the key, and sitting down to the organ, he let it speak in music the fancies that were crowding his heart and throbbing in his brain. And gradually a soft peace would fall gently upon him, rest succeed to unrest and disquietude. "He played himself into happiness," he always said, and so it was.

Instead of one ugly duckling among the swans, Ray, in his father's eyes, was the one swan amid the ducklings. He was very fond of his other children, but Ray was fashioned after his own heart, and he built great hopes upon him. The other five stared him in the face as large and practical as a row of figures, waiting to be added up, in an account book. Only Mr. Forrest never did add up his figures. His wife had taken care that everything should be as he liked, without any worry of ways or means, and Janet spoiled him much the

same. The healthy appetites of his children shocked his refinement, so he ate his meals alone, little dainty dishes cooked for him by John, who had, in his youth, served under a first-rate cook. Janet had large ideas as to the value of roast mutton for growing children ; but roast mutton has a habit of proclaiming its presence by its smell, and great care had to be taken in choosing a fine day upon which it was cooked : because then the master of the house generally walked in the garden at the hour the children dined, but if the weather proved wet, the roast mutton was postponed to another day.

And as Mr. Forrest never faced accounts, so he also avoided the very evident truth, that the children were growing tall and old. Ray's profession should have been chosen long ago ; Denys's ought to be thought of now, and he be preparing for it. But Mr. Forrest would fain keep them children always, and as life, in his eyes, was what he wanted it to be, not what it really and practi-

cally was, so his girls and boys remained children in his thoughts, in spite of the evidence of his senses.

There was yet another peculiarity connected with Mr. Forrest. When he walked in the wood at the back of the house the birds flocked tamely and fearlessly round him, greeting him as a friend. The wood might be seemingly empty as he entered it, but no sooner did he walk along the path than the air was filled with winged creatures flying from the trees where the leaves had hidden them. They hovered around him with twitters of delight: some hopped gaily before him, others nestled upon his shoulders chirruping their stories in his ear. Some of them plucked his sleeves with their little beaks, as if anxious to attract his attention, and others whirled in circles over his head, as if unable to restrain their delight at seeing him. Perhaps some subtle animal instinct told them his hands were guiltless of the blood of any living creature; that never in his life had he hunted

fox, or stag, otter, hare, or badger, or shot any feathered fowl. Animals have strange ways of reasoning, one of the many things beyond our ken.

The Forrest boys and girls were quite content to live this out-of-the-world life. It was the only life they had known. Janet was always talking about "other people," but "other people" were to them a name, a myth. The only ones they came across were those they saw on Sundays, when they went to the old grey church, which was attended by a few aged men and women, some rosy-cheeked lads and lasses, belonging to the few scattered cottages which formed the village. There was one old lady to be sure, but her form was hidden in a long black silk cloak and her face in a black silk bonnet. This was all the outside view they obtained of "other people," of their lives and belongings they knew absolutely nothing. Their own life went on, in the Old House by the River, swiftly, calmly, silently, with no variation by which to mark one day from another.

Their hours of recreation they spent in rowing upon the river. And sometimes, but very seldom, in the long summer evenings a skiff might shoot swiftly past them, with a young man in it who evidently preferred the silent, silver river and his own thoughts to the company of his fellow-creatures. There were a few of these, and when they passed, the skiffs would exchange rapid glances, but the young men would see only what they considered an ordinary party of boys and girls, and the Forrests would see young men, not differing from their own boys, except that they were better clothed—generally in flannels, in which most men and boys look their happiest and their best.

They supposed that these were some of the “other people” whom Janet so often quoted, and then they would wonder if these mysterious “other people” would come into their lives, and if they should ever mix in the world which was now to them so strangely shut out. For a little time

they would speculate upon this, and then the days would go on and no change take place ; and living so peacefully in the present, they often forgot the future for which they were waiting, and which was slowly but surely coming upon them.



CHAPTER II.

THE MASTER OF THE HOUSE.

“Che sarà, sarà.”

MONDAY afternoon in the early days of the month of August, with a hot summer sun creeping lazily into the room, which the Forrest boys and girls called their own.

It was a commonplace room enough, and the furniture of the plainest and scantiest. There was no carpet or rug, but in the middle of the room stood a large, square-shaped deal table, and there were two dining-room arm-chairs and six rush-bottomed ones scattered about. The sofa, old and roomy, was covered with chintz to hide its shabby-

ness. The three latticed windows faced the front of the house, and were filled in with broad, low window-seats. But the children would not have exchanged their room, bare as it was, for their father's dainty studio or the equally charming withdrawing-room which had been their mother's while she lived. For their furniture, if plain, was strong: the chairs would bear sitting upon—arms, backs, or seats, and were none the worse for their many overthrows; while the three windows looked straight down upon their beloved and beautiful river. That river so dear to the six boys and girls that they could not say which of them loved it the best. It was their playfellow, their companion, the only sharer of their joys and sorrows that they had ever known. They had learnt it off by heart, and knew each tree that grew, every plant that blossomed, all animal life that haunted its banks. Their father had given them two skiffs—the “Elaine” and the “Enid,” and in these they spent most of their time—when they were not studying

with their father or preparing their lessons for him.

That Monday afternoon they were expecting a summons from him, and were all six assembled, books in hand, waiting for John's slow steps to mount the stairs and give them the call.

The hand of the clock pointed to the half after three, their father was punctuality itself, and one or two rose from their seats, and gathered their belongings together, when suddenly Denys, whose head was as far out of the window as it could go, gave a sudden cry.

“What *is* the matter?”

“Has a wasp stung you?”

“Let me get out the sting.”

“There is no wasp,” said Denys, turning round a face solemn from mere astonishment,—“but *there is somebody trying to ring the bell at the gate.*”

“Nonsense!”

“Absurd.”

“You have made a mistake.”

But they all rushed to the windows to see for themselves. The windows looked down upon the heavy iron-studded door, and they could see the vibration of the wire quite distinctly, but the visitor was too much underneath the door for them to tell who it was—a he or she or it.

“If they go on trying for ever they will not make the bell ring,” said Enid, “for it was broken soon after I was born, Janet said, and it has never been mended since.”

“Father said he would rather it remained unmended,—no one ever comes here, and so what is the use of a bell?” said Cecily.

“Some one has come to-day,” said Enid. “Run, Miles, and tell John that some one is trying to ring the gate bell.”

“I wonder who it *can* be,” said Denys.

“Oh, no one in particular,” said Hester, “some one who does not know we have a back door—a

new tradesperson who has not got into Janet's ways yet."

In spite of this remark, they all waited the arrival of John, with a fair show of expectancy.

He did not hurry, for he was getting aged, and in the Old House by the River there was no occasion for hurry. There was no world to interfere with its scramblings and bustlings, so time was found for everything that had to be done, and life flowed on evenly and quietly. He crossed the lawn with careful step and slow,— and if he *was* curious no trace of it was visible in his composed face and precise manner. And yet in all the years he had lived there he had never had occasion to open that door to a visitor until that sunny afternoon in the month of August.

The heavy door was opened slowly, and John's grey head peered cautiously round it. A stranger would have thought he had gone back to the ages

ago, and that the Old House by the River was a castle on the look-out for possible besiegers. After a few moments' parley, John, very unwillingly, the children thought, opened the door wider and admitted a lady.

"It really is somebody after all," said Hester and Denys together.

"Perhaps it is a mistake in the name," said Enid cautiously. "It seems so odd after living here all these years without seeing any one to have a visitor now."

"It is one of the 'other people' Janet is always talking about," said Cecily.

"I wonder if she has come to see Father," said Ray.

"And if she will ask to see us," said Miles.

They spoke in whispers, that the stranger might not hear, and as she passed underneath their windows they were silent for a minute, but the six pairs of eyes scanned her eagerly.

She was middle-aged, tall and stout, with a large

fair, good-natured face, and a quantity of fair hair. She was dressed in black, and was covered with jets and beads.

“If that is the way ‘other people’ dress,” said Hester, drawing back from the window when she was lost to sight, “I do not admire it. Why in the sunshine she looked as if she had on a suit of armour, she shone and glittered so.”

“Poor Father!” said Enid, pityingly ; “anything of that kind always sets his teeth on edge. I do not believe he will bear it long.”

“I wonder who she is, and why she came, and what she came for,” said Hester.

“She came in a carriage,” said Denys.

“How do you know?”

“I can see the whip through that tree. It is standing near the boat-house.”

“I can see the whip and a piece of the coachman’s hat,” said Miles, excitedly.

While the young people were wondering what the world could possibly have to do with them,

John was ushering the unwelcome visitor into Mr. Forrest's darkened studio.

It was a charming room filled with daintiest art treasures and priceless antique furniture. It was cool and fresh, for it was shaded by soft curtains which wooed the breeze and banished the glare, and it was sweet with the scent of flowers which filled a few quaint vases and perfumed the air. The flowers were Enid's care, and she performed her duties punctually and carefully, changing the flowers as often as twice a day if they at all drooped or faded.

The lady followed close upon John's heels, and swept into the room just as he was announcing her name.

“I do not know if you have forgotten me, Cousin Geoffrey,” she said ; “it must be—let me see—thirty years ago, a lifetime nearly, since last we met. You were nineteen, I was a year your junior. But bless me, cousin, I should have known you anywhere ! You hardly look a day older !”

He had risen to greet her, and standing, in the subdued light, straight and slim, with his pale, refined face, and smooth, dark head, with scarce a suspicion of coming whiteness among the bright, dusky hair, he looked strangely youthful to be the father of those six sons and daughters; scarcely altered, as his cousin said, from the slender, dark-haired boy she remembered. If Time had painted a few wrinkles upon the face they were not visible in this "dim religious light," in which Mr. Forrest delighted.

"I live so entirely out of the world," he answered, lifting his eyes to her face. "A quiet peaceful life flowing on evenly, like the river at our gates, does not make havoc with nature as does the restless, active, tiring lives of those who live in the midst of what is termed—and aptly termed—the world."

"It certainly does not," said his cousin, taking a seat, "though I must say I have never seen the result until now. I shall recommend my friends

to try a hermit's life if they wish to retain youth and good looks. Why I was a year younger than you, and I might be twenty years older now, judging by appearances."

He could not contradict her even for politeness' sake. She had certainly altered from the golden-haired slender girl he remembered, and not for the better. As Enid said, she jarred upon his sensitive nerves and worried him. She was sitting in a quaint old chair, once the property of a French King, ebony cunningly inlaid with mother-of-pearl and silver, and when a ray of light touched her, the shining jets and beads upon her flashed and sparkled as if they were in motion. He shut his eyes for a minute and conjured up before his mind the forms clad in dainty robes and soft perfumed laces that once had filled that chair, and opening his eyes upon the reality before him, he sighed gently and shivered. His cousin seeing him absorbed in thought, as she imagined, spoke again.

"Did you ever take enough interest in me, cousin, to inquire whether I was ever married, or remained single?"

He confessed he had not.

"I was Marian Duncombe, now I am Marian Irvine. I have been a widow for eight years. My husband held a good civil appointment in India, but died from a severe sunstroke. Do you not wonder how I found you out in your seclusion, Cousin Geoffrey?"

"Yes."

"I had heard you were somewhere in these parts, and when I was thinking of coming into the neighbourhood myself—What is the matter, cousin? how white you have grown. Not that you ever had much colour. But do you feel faint? Let me ring the bell for wine, or sal volatile."

"No, thank you," he answered, "it is nothing, I shall be better soon."

No wonder he grew pale at the news thus

brought to him. For more than twenty years he had guarded himself in this seclusion, no enchanted castle was more securely kept, and now this privacy was to be invaded and he would know no further peace. He could not realise yet what it would be, but the bare mention of it made him quite sick and ill.

“Do you often suffer from these fainting sensations, cousin?”

“*Never* as a rule. My health is excellent.”

“I am glad to hear it. Faintness is bad, it shows some mischief with the heart. I was telling you how I found you out. I knew you were leading a hermit’s life somewhere about here, and I went to your banker and asked for your address. He would not give it for a long time, but I persevered, said you were a relation, and that I wanted particularly to see you, and so forth. At last he gave it to me, and I am here, as you see.”

“Yes.”

“The house I am come down about is nine miles from here.”

“Are you thinking of buying it?”

“Oh dear no. I am only renting it for two or three months, to recruit myself after the London season. I have invited all my friends down in turn, and I hope we shall have a pleasant autumn. Do you know the house at all, cousin? It is named The Hermitage, and I believe for some years it has been let only as a summer and autumn residence. An old couple with their daughter and her husband and children are put in it to keep it aired during the winter months.”

“I do not know it at all,” he answered. “I never stir beyond the garden and the copse at the back of the house.”

“And I suppose it will be useless for me to try and induce you to come and see us, and join in our pleasures? The habit of twenty years must be second nature.”

"It is so, though I thank you for your kindness in thinking of me."

And then he expected that Mrs. Irvine would take her leave; but she did nothing of the sort, she resettled herself in the chair. His heart sank.

"There are your children, Cousin Geoffrey. They must be quite grown-up by now."

"You are mistaken, they are very far from being grown-up, I am happy to say; they are mere children, I assure you."

She raised her eyebrows and seemed incredulous.

"Is the eldest a boy or girl?"

"Girl."

"And her age?"

"I really do not remember," he said dreamily. "It seems only the other day she was born."

"Time passes so quickly. Say she is seventeen, she could not be much less. Many girls come out at seventeen."

"In the world perhaps, but with that we have

nothing to do. There will be no coming out for Enid, of that I am quite decided."

"We will not quarrel about it. I am not smitten with many of the young ladies I meet in society. But Cousin Geoffrey, you must allow me to say I think you are wrong in keeping your children so entirely apart from other people. You cannot do so all their lives."

"I will if I can. I am sure that the less my children know of the world, the better and happier they will be. I speak from experience."

Mrs. Irvine grew graver.

"Sorrow and suffering comes to all people in some form or another, and at some time of their life," she said. "The man who shut his son up in the strong tower, that no evil might happen to him, was conquered by destiny in the shape of a bundle of faggots brought in to light the fire. An adder came out of the wood, stung the boy, and he died. You cannot prove stronger than destiny, cousin. What GOD wills, will be."

He did not answer.

“Let me have the children once now and then that I may make acquaintance with my own flesh and blood, my first cousin’s children. I will send the carriage for them and send them back in it punctually to the hour you name. But I should like to know them, and I beg you will allow me this pleasure. We shall be here three months at the longest, and then there is little chance that I shall be in the neighbourhood again, for I am thinking, perhaps, of settling in Florence. My plans are nearly so decided.”

The last inducement won the day. Mr. Forrest’s recollection of his cousin of old was that she was a determined woman if once her mind was set upon a thing. He was anxious too to get rid of her, and it was at last arranged that when she came down to the Hermitage the children should go to spend the afternoon with her. More, Mr. Forrest would not promise.

The master of the citadel had surrendered upon

his own terms, but Mrs. Irvine had vanquished, and she was content not to press the matter further. She wisely took her departure at once, giving her cousin no time to change his mind.

The master of the house regretted his decision so soon as the heavy iron-banded door had shut upon his visitor. He tried to resume the reading she had interrupted, but his mind wandered, nor would it be recalled. The thought he had so often put aside, "growing up, growing up," seemed to stare at him from every page. He shut the book with a gentle sigh, and stepping out of the window wended his way to the little wood facing his studio, and at the back of the house. For some minutes he walked alone, then soon were heard glad sweet chirupings from tree and bush, and there dropped gently down, with welcome flutters, like the soft patter of rain, a crowd of birds. They greeted him with delighted twitters, hopped by his side, perched upon his shoulder, pulled his hair saucily with their tiny beaks, and while they plumed their feathers,

told him in their own language how glad they were to see him, and how they had spent that long bright summer day.

And slowly passing to and fro, his thoughts in Dreamland always, the master of the house soon forgot his cousin and the threatened change her visit would effect.



CHAPTER III.

THE FLOWER RAY GATHERED.

“Gifts bring with them an inheritance of pain, as if they were out of place in a fallen world like this.”

JANET knew nothing of the result of the stranger lady's visit to the master of the Old House by the River. John knew nothing. If he had known, Janet would have known. What Janet knew she always told her young people, but Mr. Forrest, who had forgotten all about Mrs. Irvine before she was a mile away, did not mention the subject at all, so the household remained in ignorance of the changes that were coming from afar.

Curiosity, at last, having worn itself threadbare,

they dismissed the subject from their thoughts, and gathered round the tea table, talking over the programme of that evening's arrangements.

“How are we to divide to-night?” said Cecily.

“You are getting very lazy, Cecil, and going back in your rowing,” said Denys, “you had better come into my skiff, and I will work you hard.”

“Denys, Cecil, and Miles,” said Enid, “and—”

“No, no,” pleaded Miles, “I want to go in the skiff with Ray, Enid, please.”

“You are Ray's shadow,” quoth Hester, “I am glad—”

“Never mind, Hester,” said Enid hastily, for she saw a frown upon the boy's brow. He and Hester did not sail quite smoothly together; she rather sat upon him, and he resented the being sat upon; besides, his devotion to Ray was a point upon which he was very sensitive.

“How far are you going this evening?” asked Ray.

“To Willow Island, we shall be home by eight

then, and Father said yesterday he would rather we were not later, now the days are getting shorter."

"I want to finish my book," said Ray, "so if you put me out at the Fairies' Beech, you can pick me up on your way back."

"In that case we must have Hester instead of Miles. I cannot manage with only Miles."

"Never mind, Miles," said Ray, seeing the boy's disappointment, "you shall come in my skiff tomorrow, that will do just as well, will it not?"

"Yes," said the little fellow, brightening.

It was only a minute later, when, with their hats on, they crossed the lawn, opened the door, and saw the shining river at their feet. Their father had given them the skiffs, and had a boat-house built for them when he found how fond they were of the silver river.

The Elaine and Enid had been newly painted this year, and looked fresh and clean. Enid preferred her namesake, and Denys the Elaine. The

Elaine was broader, and shallower, the Enid being built deeper at the sides, and narrower ; the Enid was certainly the prettiest when in the water, she was more slenderly and gracefully fashioned, but Denys said the Elaine was the best for real work, and as he was a firstrate oarsman, he ought to know.

Denys and Cecily took the sculls in the Elaine, Enid and Ray those of the Enid ; Hester was to row when Ray departed. The Elaine shot off in a moment, and left the Enid far behind ; Cecily was not such a finished rower as her sister, but she had more strength of arm, while Denys was the crack one of the party. Hester began to grumble.

“At that rate they will be at Willow Island before we are a quarter of the way. I shall be quite glad when we drop you, Ray, for I think I row quicker than you.”

Ray laughed.

“I do not think so, Hessie, but at any rate we shall prove it this evening.”

"I like rowing with Ray best," said Enid candidly. "You pull strong and quickly, Hester, but you keep very bad time. Now Ray pulls smoothly and evenly, and keeps excellent time."

The Elaine had been out of sight from the time she started, and at the Fairies' Beech Ray got out as he said he would. The Fairies' Beech was about half way to Willow Island, and was so called because the grass was worn away in a complete circle around it, and tradition said it was where the fairies nightly danced around this large wide-spreading tree. The Forrests, when children, always said the fairies had very good taste, for the copper beech was such a pretty colour.

They left Ray, lying underneath it. At least they left his body there, but his thoughts and imaginations were far away, ere yet the skiff had swayed unsteadily from the bank. Enid was quite right, Hester was not a good rower. She pulled short, strong strokes, which sent the skiff from side to side, first into one bank, then into the

other. She was self-opinionated upon the matter, thought she rowed well, and did not try to keep in with Enid's long, swift strokes. However, that evening, she distinguished herself by catching a crab, and as this was a very great exception even in little Miles's rowing, it made her feel rather ashamed of herself.

"So much for your boasting, Hester," said Enid. "Though you pull so much stronger than Ray, he was quite right, we are not going nearly so fast as when he had the scull. You will not keep time with me, now you shall be stroke, and I will see if I can keep in with you."

This made a little difference for the better, but not much, and they had to bear the ridicule of the Elaine party, who had been for some time comfortably seated on Willow Island, wondering what made them so late.

Ray finished his book, put it down and looked dreamily about him. The birds were going to bed and making such a chattering over it, just

as much as if they had beds to air and make, and clothes to tuck around them, instead of merely, as was the case, choosing a sheltered branch and cuddling their heads beneath their wings. A king-fisher darted into his nest in the bank, and Ray was the witness of a great act of courtesy upon the part of a dragon-fly towards a moth. It was a large night-moth, and had come out a little too early for its own comfort. The two chose the same resting-place, a slender, swaying piece of quaking-grass, and they both alighted upon it at the same time. After a short contest, the dragon-fly pushed his adversary with great grace and decision off the stalk, and the moth fell down upon its back, leaving a quantity of soft yellow powder behind it as a token of its defeat. The dragon-fly, content to gain the victory, darted swiftly away and was soon lost to sight.

This little scene was hardly over when sounds of woe, not far distant, broke upon Ray's ear.

It was a child's voice sobbing, and crying, and screaming, and Ray sprang to his feet at the unusual sound. The river was not a high road, but a secluded part of the country, and generally free from human interference. There was no mistaking the cries, however, for they grew louder and louder, now a discordant shriek, then a piteous wail.

Ray flew to the spot from whence the sounds came. A hedge interposed, he crept through a gap in it upon hands and knees, tore his clothes with the brambles, stung his soft, flushed cheeks with the nettles, stood upon his feet, and looked around the field.

A short distance from him, under a clump of trees, a dirty tent was pitched, and at the opening of the tent there was a man holding a child, eight or nine years old, by the hair, while he beat her soundly with a stick he had in his hand. Ray cleared the space between them in a few strides, his heart throbbing wildly, his eye sparkling, his

cheek tingling. It was all the same to him that the girl was ugly and begrimed with dirt, her clothes no more than a few soiled rags, her coarse hair tangled and matted, with nothing in herself or her surroundings to interest, or to vest with any shadow of romance—had she been as lovely as the Princesses for whom the knights of old broke their lances, and as daintily dressed in silken robes, it would have been all the same to Ray. She was in distress, that was enough for him, and he was there to help her. He wrenched the stick from the man's hand, and before he could understand or exclaim, broke it into bits and tossed it away.

When the man realised what had been done, he swore dreadfully, took the girl by the shoulders and shook her. Ray compelled him to loosen his hold, and threw his arms protectingly around the astonished child. The man faced her champion.

“She's my child,” he said, shaking his fist at



Ray. "Be off. I'll do as I please with my own flesh and blood."

"You will not ill-treat her," replied Ray firmly.

"Who says so?"

"I do."

"And who may 'ee be, I'd like to know?"

"Raleigh Forrest."

The man paused. Ray's dauntlessness and steady courage, the light and truth in the pure, young face, stopped him for a minute. Then he turned aside with a short laugh.

"Have your way now," he said. "I can finish the beating another time. It's only put off, Sue, mind."

Sue, hearing this, clung to Ray, renewing her howls. He could see the bare neck with the large red marks rising from it, and putting her gently from him, he followed the man, who, with his back towards them was now lighting a short, black pipe. Ray touched him, he paid no attention, and Ray had to go round to face him.

“What’s up now,” said the man with a sneer, “ain’t ye satisfied yet?”

“No,” replied Ray looking straight at him. “I want you to promise me never to beat that little girl again.”

“Well, you *are* a cheeky ‘un, I must say. I told you afore, I’ll do as I plazes with my own flesh and blood. I’ll beat her when I’ve a mind, and I’ll finish out this beating, and she’ll get an extry share for its being put off, and that’s all the good *your* meddling’s done her.”

“Listen,” said Ray detaining the man as he was turning away. “Will you beat me instead of her, please?”

The man took the pipe out of his mouth and stared, for once too much astonished to speak.

“I am a boy and I can bear it better,” urged Ray. “She is only a girl. Beat me, please, instead of her.”

Without a word the man flung aside his pipe, strode to a willow tree and cut down a branch.

A slender stick, willowy as the tree whose stripling it was, it could cut into the tender flesh as no stouter stick could have done. With an oath the man said savagely,

“I’ll see what mettle you’re made of,” and prepared to strike. Ray retreated, putting up his hands.

“Stay,” he said. “You must first promise me not to beat your girl.”

“Oh! that is only fair, you take the beating and she shall go free. But it’s my belief you’ll shirk it precious soon. Now then, are ye ready?”

“Yes.”

The stick descended upon his back and Ray shivered with the pain. The second blow and all the blood in his body seemed rushing to his head. He set his teeth together and prayed for strength to bear it without any noise, but he could not help flinching as the blows descended fast and strong.

It was over and he had borne it in silence, only the tears had forced themselves, against his will, into his eyes.

"Well, you *are* a plucky 'un, and you've took it like a plucky 'un," said the man surveying his victim. "I hit sharp and hard, didn't I? Shouldn't wonder now," looking at the boy's quivering face, "if I did give ye the promise ye've set your heart upon. I ain't chicken-hearted, and I like a plucky 'un. But first, I'd wish to know what ye went for to make such a breeze over my giving our Sue a bit of a beating. She ain't *your* flesh and blood."

"She is a fellow-creature," said Ray. "GOD made her and He made me, and when I saw she was being ill-treated it was my duty to protect her. GOD made us all brothers and sisters, since He is our FATHER. Now I want you to give me your promise not to beat her again. - Will you, please?"

"Sue," called her father, "come here."

She came; wonderment looking out from her soiled face and tangled hair.

“This young gent has been and taken your thrashing, and wants me to give ‘un my promise not to beat you again. Now, Sue, you’re that aggravatin’ I dunno as I can keep my promise. But I’ll just say that unless you’re *uncommon* aggravatin’, I’ll try and keep my hands off ye. Now go in and see how the missis is.”

The child disappeared inside the dirty tent and Ray turned to go.

“The missis is took bad,” said the man, “that’s how we come to bide here. Dunno as how she’ll ever git over it.”

“Have you had the doctor?” asked Ray.

The man laughed sneeringly.

“We ain’t got no victuals to give her, let alone doctors and their stuff. Come in and look at her, p’raps ye’ll be able to tell what ails her.”

Ray followed him. Upon a heap of straw, and covered over with a dirty shawl, a woman lay.

The glassy eyes, pallid face, and black lips struck such terror into Ray, as no beating, however severe, could call forth. He went quickly into the air and gasped for breath.

“She’s bad, ain’t she?” said the man, but more as if he wanted to be told she was not so bad as she seemed.

Ray could not give him this comfort. Ill and starving the woman certainly was, and Ray felt himself powerless to help. He had no money, and no chance of getting any money. His possessions were few, and only one of them of any value.

When their mother died, each of them had something of hers as a remembrance. To Ray’s share had fallen a likeness of her in a lovely setting of opals and diamonds. The thought flashed across him in a moment ; the likeness would be as dear to him without its setting, and if these people could sell the jewels, and procure food and a doctor’s help, the woman, ill as she was, might yet recover.

“I have no money, and I cannot help you in that way,” he said, turning to the man, “but I have something that belongs to me, some jewels, that I shall be able to give you. I will bring them quite early to-morrow morning. They are quite my own, and you need not be afraid of taking them. I can do as I like with them ; and you can sell them to buy food and have a doctor for your sick wife. Now I must hurry, for I am late. Good evening.”

The man nodded a good-night and followed the boy at a distance, to see where he lived. Ray was only just in time at the Fairies’ Beech. There lay his book where he had flung it down, and he had just picked it up when the Elaine party shot merrily past, shouting that the Enid was not far behind.

She came along more slowly, for Enid was rowing both sculls, Hester in disgrace, occupying the more humble position of steerer. Ray asked Enid if she would mind continuing the two oars,

and she gave a ready assent, only exclaiming at his paleness.

"You are so white, Ray; Janet and I were talking of you only the other day. You read too much; even when you are not at lessons you are nearly always poring over some book or another. Take care, Hester, what are you thinking of? You will have us in the midst of those flags if you are not more careful."

Ray was never a great talker, and his silence passed unnoticed. He had never been so thankful for his bed as he was that evening. He was sore, bruised, and aching, and when he fell asleep at last, it was only to tumble into uneasy slumbers, waking every few minutes with the pain of his bruises, and having restless dreams and visions of the sick wife, the dirty tent, the miserable child. The figure of the man haunted him but little, and the remembrance of his beating was only recalled to him by the pain he felt in his waking moments.

He rose early, dressed himself with difficulty, took out the portrait from its jewelled setting, put the latter in his pocket, and before any one else in the house was astir, unbarred the door and stole gently forth, dragging his stiff aching limbs over the dew-washed fields.

Sue was nowhere visible, but the man was waiting to receive him.

“Do ye feel the worse for your thrashing?” was his good-morrow. “Eh! but ye look the worse, and no mistake. Better have let it alone and let Sue have had it. Her’s used to ’em and takes to ’em more kindly.”

“You promised me you would not beat her again,” reminded Ray sternly.

“And ’cos ye’re a plucky ’un I’ll keep my promise. Unless Sue’s *that* aggravating that my hands ain’t my own, then I can’t keep ’em off her. She’s gone to the town now, to see what she can get given her for the missis.”

“How is your wife?”

"Nor better, nor worse. Her would get on a bit if we had victuals to give her."

"That is what I came for," said Ray, "to bring you this. You can sell it, and procure doctor's help and food for your wife and yourselves."

The man extended his hand carelessly, while Ray's dived into the recesses of his pocket. Most likely he expected some small bauble, a ring or brooch that would bring them a few shillings, to keep them from starving for the time, but the minute the frame touched his fingers they closed over it instinctively, as if by the mere contact he knew its value. And to within a pound or two he could value it pretty accurately. He had been engaged in several burglaries, besides a great deal of poaching business; now, being home upon ticket-of-leave, for prudence' sake he was behaving more quietly. By selling these jewels he saw at a glance they could live in comfort for some years.

He looked from the sparkling jewels to Ray,

then from Ray to the jewels, and without speaking a word went into the tent to his wife.

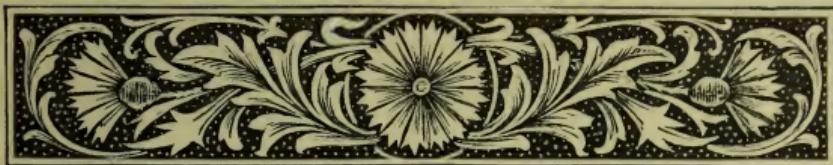
Ray stood listlessly without, not meaning to act the part of eavesdropper, but the man's voice was neither low nor soft, and a sentence which reached his ear caused the blood to flush into his face, staining it a deep scarlet colour. They had been speaking of him, and it was evident that both man and wife held the same view of the case, namely, that Ray was a poor simple sort of lad who did not understand the value of the gift he was making.

For a moment indignation conquered every better feeling, and he longed to rush into the tent and proclaim the truth. It was the first impulse, and a natural one, but he did not act upon it.

On the contrary, he walked quietly off, without waiting for the man to reappear, and made his way home across the fields and past hedges that glistened with dew-drops as bright and lovely as the diamonds that so short a time ago had shone

around his mother's face. Yet the boy's heart ached as well as his back, and with a pain that was more unbearable.

He had stretched out his hand to pluck the red Rose of Charity, and the Rose in the picking had pricked him sorely.



CHAPTER IV.

RAY'S SONG.

“Puisque tu sais chanter, ami, tu sais pleurer.”

RAY felt ill for several days after his beating, and the pain in his heart was fully equal to that of his bruised back. For the first time in his life he had come into contact with “other people,” the “other people” of whom they had heard so much from Janet and read about in books, but of whom they had as yet known nothing personally. His hand had been the first to open the door upon this wide and varied region, commonly called the world.

He had known there was sorrow in the world,

and had been prepared to take his part in it as well as he could, by fighting the battles of the weak against the strong, as all true knights had done and should for ever do. Herein lay the difference between himself and his father. They were both equally sensitive to anything that jarred, as things will jar, upon fine, highly-strung natures ; but his father was content to keep from him, as far as possible, all that was unsightly, sad, or sorrowful. The boy longed to go forth and do his best—with a true, pure heart—to alleviate the sadness of which he had read.

His books taught him the need of a strong arm and a pure heart, but they looked upon the glorious side of the picture, dwelt upon the nobleness of the contest, and the exceeding great reward, but spoke no word of failures, or seeming failures, nor of the sickening feeling of loneliness which the soldier feels when, the conflict over for the time, he rests upon his sword ere another fight begins.

A medley of feelings possessed the boy and

weighed him to the ground. Disappointment and depression connected with his adventure, weariness of surroundings, which made even the sunshine torture to him ; a sense of loneliness and miscomprehension ; a restless, unsatisfied yearning for something, he knew not what ; a yearning so intense that he was sick at heart,—like a blind man groping always in the dark for what he can never find.

In this frame of mind he walked to church upon the Sunday following. They had not far to go, for the church was upon the other side of the copse, and there was a private way through their own grounds. Ray was allowed a key, and could let himself in whenever he liked to play upon the organ.

The church was very old and fortunate, inasmuch as it had suffered not at all either from the hands of the despoiler of Cromwell's times or the whitewash and plaster of the modern restorer. It was a very tiny church, built upon an

incline. The churchyard sloped to a field of golden corn, the golden corn sloped down to the shining river. It was built of grey stone, each window being of rich stained glass, and between the windows were niches filled in with small figures of some of the saints carved also in grey stone. The Forrests did not go to church tidily, but in scattered fashion by ones, or twos, or threes, as they were ready, or as the fancy took them. Ray, that morning, was joined by Miles, who brought a small trouble,—some skirmish with Hester,—to his brother for sympathy and help. Ray found it difficult to bring his mind to hear Miles's story patiently and to give advice in the matter. How petty those sort of things seemed to him in his present mood, yet the child's grievance was a real one so far as it went.

Ray's favourite nook was underneath the soldier saint, S. Martin, who was portrayed with half a cloak upon his shoulder, the other half lying at his feet. When the service began he opened his

Prayer Book to follow the Psalms, and as he opened it his eyes fell upon a text that riveted his attention, chained his wandering thoughts : *“When I awake up after Thy likeness, I shall be satisfied with it.”*

It was service and sermon in one for him that day. It could not lighten all the load that was bowing him down, but it made clear to him what otherwise had seemed so cloudy and enveloped in mist. Here would be the loneliness ; the struggling for perfection ; the frequent failures ; the bright dreams not realised ; our “heart’s desire” unfulfilled ; the longing and yearning more painful than tangible pain ; but *there* in the eternal years would be the realisation of our brightest dreams, for *“When I awake up after Thy likeness, I shall be satisfied with it.”*

Ray went off to the church the next evening, instead of rowing upon the river, Miles being easily persuaded to blow the organ for him. The boy was panting to put to music the new-born thoughts

which were crowding his mind, swelling in his heart.

It was a long time before he succeeded in pleasing himself. Over and over again he tried the words, the patient Miles blowing unweariedly, until at last his efforts were crowned with success. By this time the sun, low in the west, shone slanting into the church through the painted windows, and the colours of amber, and red, and blue, and gold, fell upon the grey, silent saints in their niches, and seemed to warm them into listening as the boy for the last time that day played his whole heart out in the music that pealed through the solitude of the church.

Ray's voice was a boy's voice unbroken yet, and he formed the words into an anthem, singing them in his clear, sweet, musical voice, untrained, but so naturally true that he hardly could have sung falsely had he tried.

First came the organ, and then the voice accompanying. "*When I awake*," solemnly, softly,

slowly,—“*after Thy likeness*,” rising into grander and more triumphant melody,—“*I shall be satisfied*,” with a tender lingering upon the last word,—“*I shall be satisfied with it*,” then softly dying away in perfect contentment and happiness.

The silent aisles caught the echoes, and carried them up to Heaven. The church, instead of being empty seemed full of people, as the boy's voice rose clear and sweet among the pillars, and was carried back from every nook and corner. The little grey saints, with their folded arms, seemed to waken into life and to join in the song as it floated round their heads, and to smile with sweet content as if the melody aroused happy memories in their hearts. It was strange to think of the many noble men and women who had gathered in different times beneath that roof, and how their lives had been lived, their very names and existences forgotten. And what mattered their sorrows and pains now that all was at an end? If they had been good and true, they had long ere

this realised the words that were pealing through the church as a young soldier sang them, "*When I awake up after Thy likeness, I shall be satisfied with it.*"

The birds were hushed in sleep, the sun was slowly dipping into the west, the bright flecks of colour faded from the robes of the saints, leaving them grey, motionless, untroubled as ever ; when the last notes of the organ died away, and Ray's hands were gently lifted from the keys.

The toils of the willing little labourer were over for that day, and Miles, hot and panting, with ruf-fled hair and flushed cheeks, stood beside his brother.

"Do you know, Ray," he said, rubbing his hot cheek against his brother's coat-sleeve, "that music was lovely. I think it was the most beautiful music you have ever made, Ray."



CHAPTER V.

THE FIRST FLIGHT FROM THE NEST.

“The way to be comfortable is to make others so ;
The way to make others comfortable is to appear to love them ;
The way to appear to love them is to love them in reality.”

MRS. Irvine’s note of invitation came in due time and exceedingly ruffled Mr. Forrest. As a gentleman he could not depart from his word when once it was given, so he consoled himself by thinking that after all three months would soon pass away, and he would take care to guard against further intrusion by writing to his banker and saying that his address was to be given to no one. He made this resolution, then rang the

bell for Janet, told her the children were to be ready by three o'clock the next day, when the carriage would call for them to take them to spend the afternoon with their cousin, Mrs. Irvine, who would also send them home punctually by nine o'clock the same evening. This settled, he wrote the note to his banker at once, and dismissed the disagreeable subject from mind and thoughts.

Janet did not know whether to be pleased or sorry. She was pleased her young people should see something of the world, yet she was more conscious than they were of their shortcomings in the way of clothes, and she was sensitive for their sake, lest any ridicule should be thrown upon them which would send them into their shells and give them pain. For the first time for many a year she felt vexed with her master for not thinking of the matter, and wished with all her heart that she could turn one of those countless nick-nacks into money and spend it upon her children's clothes,

that they might look, after all, not unlike "other people."

There was great excitement among the Forrests when the news was known, but Janet's trouble was not a trouble to them. Their heads were full of the mysterious world into which they were to wing their flight for the first time ; of the "other people" with whom they were at last to come into contact ; and not one thought did they give, either boys or girls, to the question of clothes. And Janet, wisely enough, did not enlighten them.

They were all in their room waiting for the carriage when Janet, standing by the deal table, surveyed them critically and in silence.

She looked at them with her own eyes,—eyes full of love for the children she had watched over from their birth, as if they had been her own. Enid, small and dark, with brown hair and grey eyes, was arrayed, like her namesake, in "a robe of faded silk," a dress that had been her mother's cut up to fit her, yellow in colour at the begin-

ning of its career, now faded into indistinctness, frayed, and short at the sleeves; even the lace ruffles, washed and ironed as only Janet could wash and iron them, failed to hide the want of length. Cecily, tall and fair, was in the same kind of soft, clinging silk, also her mother's, but hers of sapphire blue had faded in patches, and looked worse than her sister's, while it was short in the skirt even in these days of short dresses. Hester, tall and sprightly, attired in flowered chintz, had the air of running away from her things altogether. She grew so fast that it was a constant struggle between Janet and her clothes. None of the girls were beauties in the common sense of the word, but each had that fast fleeting prettiness—of youth and freshness.

Ray, Denys, and Miles were as badly off as the girls, for their coats were threadbare and shiny in places, and bore evident marks of not being tailor-made. Indeed John was the only tailor the boys' clothes knew.

Janet sighed. If with the eyes of love she was conscious of these defects, what would the critical eyes of other people see? She could only trust that they themselves might remain in ignorance of anything that would vex them, and she saw them into the large roomy carriage, with an earnest prayer that her darlings would return as happy and innocent as when they started.

The garden at the Hermitage was alive with people. That the children saw, as the carriage bowled swiftly up the avenue. Mrs. Irvine was in the porch waiting to receive them. They did not feel shy with her, she greeted them so easily and pleasantly.

“Your father is my first cousin. We were playfellows as boy and girl. I hope we shall be great friends. Let me see, you are my first cousins, once removed. What would you like to do? You boys are for cricket, of course. What are your names?”

“Raleigh, Denys, Miles.”

“And yours?” turning to the girls.

“Enid, Cecily, Hester.”

“Ah, yes. I shall remember them. What pretty names. But I did think my cousin would have called one of you after your poor mother. Johnny Lester,”—to a bright-faced boy,—“I want you. Here are three new companions for you. Make friends with them, and take them to the cricket-field. They will tell you their names as they go along.”

“Now for you,” turning to the girls. “Can you play tennis?”

They answered “No,” but Hester, never very backward, suggested she would be glad to learn.

“I am afraid we must wait a little until we get the ground clear. There is only one tennis ground, and the players staying here are good ones, and might not care to take in a beginner. However, another day we will manage to teach you, if you can come over in the morning. Ah! there is

Lena Donald. She shall take you about and show you the garden."

Lena was a pretty girl, very much got up in pompadour, laces, and ribbons, and with a waist the size of a wasp's. She glanced over the Forrests with a hardly concealed smile, but prepared to be civil and to entertain them, as Mrs. Irvine wished. But she could make nothing of them, nor they of her. She walked with Enid, the other two falling back when the path was narrow.

"Have you been to many parties this year?"

"This is our first. We live quite in the country and never go out."

"Not even to London? Then you have not seen the Royal Academy this year?"

"We have never been to London in our lives. We have never even seen a train," said Enid, candidly.

Lena could not restrain an exclamation of intense surprise. She did not realise that in a civilised country such a state of affairs could be

possible. She was silent for a few minutes, thinking it over. Then she tried another subject.

“Of course, if you live in the country, you play tennis all day long. Awfully jolly game tennis, isn’t it?”

Enid was puzzled and silent for a moment in her turn. Lena and her slang were quite as new to her as she and her sisters were to Lena.

“We do not play tennis,” she answered.

“Then what *do* you do?” was upon the tip of Lena’s tongue, in sheer desperation. But she fell back upon the weather, which they wore threadbare,—then Lena yawned and glanced about, wondering to whom she could resign the charge of these “three queer outlandish girls,” with whom she had not an idea in common.

She decided upon a stout, good-natured old gentleman, a friend of hers, who was sitting under a tree—Mr. Foster by name. She introduced them to him as “Mrs. Irvine’s cousins,” and left them in his hands with a clear conscience.

Here it was the same ground over again. Mr. Foster concluded they had been up to town for the season, and asked Enid how many balls she had been to since she came out. He put on his spectacles, and looked the three girls over from head to foot after hearing Enid's frank admission. He concluded they must be blue-stockings, and after pondering a good deal, he began about the leader in that day's "Times."

Cecily, who was spokeswoman that time, asked innocently what the "Times" was. The name of a skiff? she concluded. Mr. Foster was perfectly bewildered then, and running into the opposite extreme concluded Cecily must be a "harmless sort of lunatic," and gave them up in despair as Lena had done.

Several people spoke to them with a like result, and they attracted much attention. Some of the young ladies were rude enough to laugh openly at them and their attire, but the girls themselves were so utterly unconscious that there was anything in

themselves or their dress to call forth ridicule that, fortunately, these shafts fell harmless. Enid, and Cecily, and Hester, watched people and things with the most eager interest, and it was all so new to them that they forgot themselves in the fascination of observing the much talked of, much wondered over, "other people."

There was a little American among the visitors at the Hermitage, and after noticing the Forrests and hearing some of the remarks upon them, she determined to see if she could not make something of them and give them a better time than they seemed to be having.

She greeted them kindly, but with no set phrases, only remarking that she had heard this sort of thing was new to them. Her manner attracted them at once,—she was simple and straightforward, with no affectation. Her accent, however, proclaimed her nationality, and she used phrases which sometimes puzzled the Forrests, who had never even read an American book. Their father had

boxes from Mudie's at set intervals, but he sent the list himself and was most rigidly careful in excluding any work that had the slightest connection with the New World.

Hope Lifesay sat down among the girls and, instead of asking them questions, she talked to them, pointed out who were staying in the house, said how they amused themselves during the day, and so forth.

"It is odd to think of your living such a long way off as America," said Enid, thoughtfully. "What an *immense* way for you to travel. Do you not dread it?"

"Oh dear no," said Hope, with a merry laugh; "I have done it too often to dread it. We call the Atlantic 'the big pond' in our country, and think nothing of crossing it. This is my fourth time over here. Last season I was unlucky though. I developed measles soon after we settled ourselves in town. I was real sick for a long spell, I assure you, for I had them very badly."

"How provoking," said Hester, turning upon her with one of her quick and not ungraceful movements, "when you came over on purpose to enjoy yourself. Were not you sorry?"

"Well, yes, I guess I wasn't glad. Measles are no joke when you are grown too old to want them. But I kept up my spirits pretty well considerin', and I liked to think," with a softer inflection in her shrill voice, "that other people were having a good time though I was not able to be with them."

"There is a gentleman I should like to know the name of," said Enid. "You have not mentioned him among others. He looks so—" She paused for a word.

"So—what," demanded Hope, quickly following Enid's glance.

"I was going to say sad, but it is hardly that,—it is more indifferent,—as if he did not care for what he is about, and as if he was thinking of something else."

“ That is Captain Forbes Dunbar,” said Hope, turning wistful eyes towards the gentleman Enid had noticed, “ and the old lady beside him is his mother. You have hit the mark in describing him as indifferent, for it’s the name he has in his regiment. He don’t take any interest in anything or anybody except his mother, and he is devoted to *her*. I have never come across any one so indifferent either this side or the other side of the big pond.”

Her subdued voice and heightened colour were noticed by the three girls, who turned with fresh interest to look at Captain Dunbar.

He had straightened himself against the tree underneath which his mother sat ; and his golden uncovered head rested tiredly against the brown tree-trunk. The expression which Enid had noticed was more marked now the face was in repose, and the lines of time and thought showed upon it. His eyes were looking, but unseeingly, straight before him, and his drooping moustache hid from

view the closeness, almost to pain, with which the lips were pressed together.

There was a short pause, which the American was the first to break.

“I guess we’ll go in and have tea,” she said, rising abruptly. “Tea is laid in the dining-room, and we are to go in anyhow and have it. We are a nice little party among ourselves without waiting for any one else. Come.”

Upon their way to the house they met Ray, who was searching for them. The boys had found *their* kind more amiable than had the girls. Some little surprise was expressed at their ignorance of cricket, but no words were wasted, and the boys set to work at once to teach them. Denys and Miles proved apt scholars ; Ray, not caring for the game, had been wandering about alone.

Soon after tea dancing was begun upon the lawn. Hope knew better than to ask them if they danced, for she guessed the answer would be in the negative. They were sitting in one of the

dining-room windows when the first notes of the music struck up. Hope was in the midst of the three girls who were hanging upon her words, and once having taken them under her wing, she found it difficult to tear herself from them. She had a special reason for wanting to join the dancers. Since she had first seen Forbes Dunbar he had excited her interest by being so unlike any one else, then she had magnified him into a hero, and little by little her heart had gone out to him. She had a faint hope, if she was among the dancers, that he might ask her to dance,—he had done so at one or two of the parties at which she had met him, and as he never danced more than three dances in an evening she had felt the being singled out a special honour. She gave a wistful glance upon the lawn, to see if perchance that fair, lazy head were in sight, then turned her back resolutely upon the gay company, and devoted herself afresh to the Forrests. Hope never did things by halves, and nobody could have guessed from her merry

laugh that she had just then made a small sacrifice.

She could tell so much that the girls were longing to hear about, and they listened with absorbed interest. But once, in reply to a remark from Cecily, she put up her hands with a pathetic gesture.

“Don’t,” she said, slowly and gravely, “don’t wish you had seen as much of the world as I have. That is the mistake we make in our country, I see it more and more the longer I live. Our girls grow up too fast, they cram a life-time into a few years. We had much better wait and let things come. Just look at me! I’m like the general in history, who cried because he had no more worlds to conquer. Was it Julius Cæsar or Alexander? I’ve been everywhere and seen everything. I’ve done the Continent three times, galleries, churches, statues, scenery and sights. And I am only twenty-three, and yet I seem, oh! fifty or a hundred, compared to you.”

"We have seen nothing," said Cecily, "absolutely nothing."

"All in good time," said Hope. "Isn't there one of your English proverbs which says, that 'All things come to those who wait.' And if—"

"If it does not come?" said Hester quickly.

"Well, then I guess it's because you're better without it, and you will never feel the miss of it. But girls, where has your brother slipped away to? He was here a minute ago."

"He is here now," said Hester, "poring over a book in that corner. He reads, reads, reads, all day long. Come here, Ray, and enjoy yourself."

"Perhaps he *is* enjoying himself," said the little American, with that quick comprehension which was her great charm. "Different people have different ways of enjoying themselves. But I do wish," she continued, walking to Ray's quiet corner, "that you would play to me a bit. I love music, though I can't play myself, and your sisters tell me you can play real well."

Ray coloured.

"I would willingly, but I can only play the organ, and—"

"There is no organ? ah! but you don't half know the treasures of the Hermitage," she said, gaily. "Up, fair ladies, and follow me."

They followed her down a long passage, at the end she turned aside, opened a door, and they entered a small music room, fitted up with a few low seats, a harp, organ, and piano. The twilight shadows were already gathering, and heavy moreen curtains made the room darker than it would otherwise have been.

Ray unlocked the organ dreamily, his brain full of thoughts. Here were many "other people" about him, all bent upon enjoyment, and he felt he had no part with them, nor they with him. He wanted to find an outlet for the yearning that swelled his heart, and was such exquisite pain; he was longing to realise some of his many dreams, and to go forth and do battle for those who were

sorrowful, suffering, weak, with the good old watch-word for his motto, "GOD and the right."

As his fingers wandered over the keys, the room faded ; in its place there was the grey church with the little grey saints in their niches, the colours from the stained glass falling softly upon them, and the grand old pillars catching his song, and echoing it to Heaven. And before he could reason as to what he should play, he broke into the soft sweet symphony of the song he had made a short time ago.

Now Forbes Dunbar had been in the window recess when the party entered the room. He had come here to be alone, and his impulse was to leave at once. But when the first soft notes broke upon his ear, he stayed, the heavy curtains falling around him, and hiding him from sight.

The low sweet prelude stole through the room, and then the boy's voice was uplifted, clear and true, singing with an intensity of feeling that breathed forth in every note, for he was uttering in

song the pathetic thoughts which were crowding his heart and throbbing in his brain : " *When*," low and lingeringly the word was dwelt upon, " *When I awake up after Thy likeness, I shall be satisfied with it.*" Now louder, then softer, then dying off as if the singer had breathed out his soul in pure delight at the perfect satisfaction which could not be expressed. The anthem lasted in its changes for about ten minutes, and when the last notes passed into silence, no one spoke, not even to say " thank you." And Ray, with soft flushed cheeks and dreamy eyes, scarcely realising that he was not alone, went on, half unconsciously, with one of Beethoven's lovely sonatas.

Hope listened with tears in her eyes, until voices were heard calling for the Miss Forrests. Then they had to run off to put on their things, while Ray stayed behind to shut up the organ.

Another pair of hands helped him, and looking up, in the gloom of the room, he found Forbes Dunbar's face bent over him.

No one has discovered the law that attracts one person to another, and the reverse. I suppose it is something sympathetic in nature in the one case, and antagonistic in the other. But it is useless fighting against the attraction when it comes, "what will be, will be."

A day or two back, if any one had told Forbes that a boy of fifteen would have had such a strange attraction for him, he would have smiled cynically, he never laughed—and have totally disbelieved them.

For many years now Forbes Dunbar's life had been a heavy weight upon him. A yearning, a longing possessed him, haunted him wherever he went. He had drifted with the stream, it is true, going to concerts, balls, theatres, dinners, if he had to go, but sick to death of the gay routine, and shirking them whenever he could. And of late, he had been quite morbid, feeling as if everything around him was unreal and shadowy, and he, among the people, moving as if he were always a person

in a dream, and not his real, living self. It was an unhealthy state in which to be, and he knew it, but did not try to rouse himself or shake it off. If he roused himself that craving would come back, a gnawing pain at his heart, which he dreaded unspeakably, for nothing seemed to satisfy it. But the words and music of Ray's song that evening cleared the gathered shadows just as the mist rolls away in an instant beneath the warm sun from the mountain tops. A voice told him that ease and pleasure, and happiness are not our end in this life. We must pass along the path of duty if we would gain the reward of perfect satisfaction. Here, must be the striving after perfection, if hereafter we would realise it in its completion. "*When I awake up after Thy likeness, I shall be satisfied with it,*" but we must first have the confidence of having strained every nerve to merit that satisfaction.

Duty is stern and real. Forbes wondered where his lay. Not among the butterflies of the world,

not in amusement, nor in so-called society, but where?

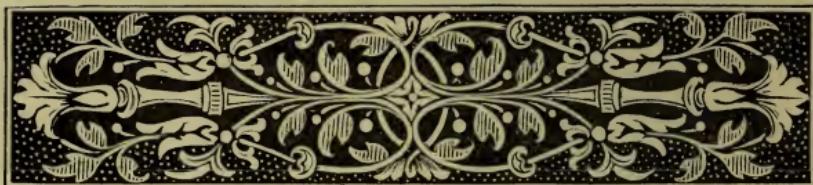
In a short time the answer came, and Ray's song bore fruit.

"I like your music exceedingly," said Forbes, as he and Ray left the music room. "May I ride over to-morrow afternoon, and will you play to me?"

"Oh, yes," answered Ray, who felt he had found a friend, and one who would understand him.

Janet scanned her children eagerly upon their return, but read only happiness in their faces. Ray went up to her as he had been wont to do when a little fellow, and putting his arms round her neck, kissed her upon each cheek.

"Bless them," thought Janet, "and I have been worrying over them all the time they've been away, and here they are come back just the same as when they went out, only may be brighter. Well, I am glad they went."



CHAPTER VI.

IN THE MOONLIGHT, UPON THE RIVER.

“Our direct efforts to teach may be contradicted by our lives, while the indirect influence is our very life.”

IF the master of the house had not bitterly regretted already the promise he had made to his cousin, he had reason to regret it a thousand times more the day following his children’s visit to the Hermitage.

About eleven o’clock in the morning Hope Lifesay drove over to call upon the three girls. Mr. Forrest did not see her, but he had to give permission for the studies to be interrupted, that the girls might entertain their new friend, which

they were nothing loath to do. A friend was such a novelty to them, and they liked the lively, warm-hearted little American who had been so friendly with them upon their first introduction to the world.

About half-past four in the afternoon came Forbes Dunbar to call upon Ray. But he inquired for Mr. Forrest first, and the master of the house was compelled to receive him. Forbes did not jar upon him as Mrs. Irvine had done, but Mr. Forrest was very glad when the invitation to stay and dine, which he felt compelled to give, was declined, and Captain Dunbar begged that he might be allowed a cup of afternoon tea with the school-room party instead. Mr. Forrest most gladly handed him over to be entertained by his sons and daughters.

Thus Captain Dunbar proved the first visitor to whom Enid had given a cup of tea. She was very shy, but Forbes had a knack of setting people at their ease, when he chose to exert

himself, and that evening he succeeded so well that the tea-party passed off successfully.

Afterwards they divided, Enid, Cecily, Hester, Denys, went for their usual row, while Forbes went to the church to be played to by Ray, accompanied by the faithful Miles to fag for them.

This was the beginning of much intercourse between Hope and the girls, Captain Dunbar and Ray. Forbes's listless manner had quite changed, and he sought Ray's society upon every opportunity. Poor Mr. Forrest was helpless in the hands of Fate. Holiday after holiday was granted that Denys and Miles might play cricket at the Hermitage, and the girls and Ray walk or go upon boating excursions with their separate friends. He would never have consented but for the prospect of a speedy cessation, to which he looked forward, and every day he consoled himself by thinking that the end of the three months, which was the limit of Mrs. Irvine's stay, was getting

nearer and nearer, and then the reins would be once more tightened, never again to be slackened or let go. And, thus thinking, he would dismiss the subject as he did all disagreeables, lesser or greater, from his mind, and sauntering in the wood, forgot such a thing as the world existed, while he caressed the birds that fluttered so joyfully and trustingly around him.

One evening, when the hunter's moon held high court in the heavens, Forbes and Ray were returning later than usual from a boating expedition.

The banks between which they passed, shone like burnished silver, for the dew lay thick upon the grass, and the light from the unusually brilliant moon, showed each blade and twig as the boat shot silently by. The two were not talking, for Forbes had been unusually dreamy that evening, only a sudden lurch of the boat caused him to rouse himself.

“We nearly capsized. I was half asleep I think.”

"It was my fault," replied Ray. "I was wondering what *that* is?"

Forbes followed the direction of the boy's finger, to where among the tangled grasses lay a dark shapeless mass.

"We can row on and see," he said, indifferently, for he was thinking of other things.

They stopped the boat close by the bank and looked for a minute at the object in question, while an icy coldness seemed to freeze the warm blood in their veins, and their lips were closed with horror.

A shapeless, dirty bundle of rags it appeared to be at first. But lying upon a large, cool, smooth leaf, as if its coolness and softness had made a resting place for it, was a woman's face framed in iron-grey hair. The eyes were open and staring, the lips parched and cracked, the face so pallid and thin that you could almost see through it, the skin dried and shrunken as a mummy's. It was as if the poor creature had

dragged herself down by the cool, fresh water, and lying there was content to die.

Forbes shuddered, drew back, and took up the sculls as if preparing to go on. Ray, on the contrary, sprang lightly out, and was kneeling by the side of the silent form before Forbes could stop him.

“Come back, Ray, at once,” said Forbes authoritatively. “You don’t know what you are doing. You will catch some dreadful disease if you go near—that—thing.”

Ray looked up—the pure, pale, refined young face expressed none of the repulsion so plainly marked in Forbes’s face. In Ray’s there was nothing but sadness for the sufferer. However much inwardly his sensitive nature shrank from touching the repulsive bundle beside him, he did not show it, but made the effort calmly and quietly, lifting gently the rough grey head, while dipping his hand in the cool water he bathed the brow and lips.

Forbes was by his side and laid forcible hands upon him.

“Ray,” he began.

“It is a woman,” said Ray simply and earnestly.

Forbes straightened himself and grew scarlet, even in the pale light of the stately queen who smiled so coldly and serenely upon them.

Ray had not meant to rebuke him, such an idea had never entered his head. Forbes’ exclamations had fallen upon deaf ears; he had been absorbed in the woman from the beginning. She was in need, sore need, and they were here to succour her. It did not occur to him that Forbes might view the matter differently or that he would fail to help.

Nor did he in the long run. He shrank, as most young men will, and naturally, from any contact with such misery, and sickness, and poverty. Each alone perhaps would have been bearable, combined they were repulsive to him. But Ray’s simple words struck the right chord, and roused all the chivalry latent in his nature. As for Ray, the



woman needed help, and that was sufficient. A duchess in silks and laces would not have received more care and reverent tending than this woman by the river side, old, forlorn, and neglected.

Forbes, ashamed of himself, knelt down beside Ray, and helped, shrinkingly and gingerly at first, then firmly, carefully, and heartily as Ray, when once his sympathies were aroused, himself and his position forgotten.

Together they lifted the woman into a safer and more restful place upon level ground, bathed her lips and brow until she opened her eyes and moaned faintly.

“I wonder if I have the good luck to have my shooting-flask with me,” said Forbes, feeling in his pockets. “Ah! here it is. I did not change my coat this evening, and thanks to that, the flask is here.”

They mixed a little brandy with some water, and giving it to the woman in small quantities it seemed to revive her marvellously.

“The best thing we can do for her,” said Forbes, “is to find some one who would take her in and nurse her. I would willingly pay for her. You are a native, Ray, is there any cottage near where she could be taken in and tended?”

“The cottages are much further down the river, and I have never been into any of them, so I do not know what kind of people live in them. I wonder if Janet would mind if I take her to our home?”

“Very much indeed, I should say. It would not be fair to Janet or your sisters either.”

“Perhaps not,” said Ray; “but what can we do for her? We are only a few yards from home, and if you will wait here I will ask Janet for some beef-tea. I know there is some, for Enid has not been well, and Janet made her some to strengthen her.”

Ray darted off, leaving his friend kneeling upon the dewy grass, under the light of the silver moon, moistening the lips of the tramp with brandy and

water. It was not a situation the young officer would have chosen, and the minutes were not winged that passed before Ray's return.

He arrived breathless, and said he should have been quicker, only the beef-tea was in a jelly, and he had to wait for it to be melted. He brought it in a deep jar, and while Forbes held the woman's head, he prepared to feed her with a spoon he had brought for the purpose.

She swallowed some of the beef-tea, then fell back unconscious again. They looked at each other, and Forbes, the more practical of the two, almost groaned aloud as he wondered what was to be done. Ray, no doubt, with his high-flown notions of chivalry, would stay there all night, bathing the woman's brow and moistening her lips with brandy and water, but something must be decided, and that soon. But then Forbes felt he had wronged the boy, for Ray's sympathy was so great, that it brought common-sense in its train, when that valuable and rare commodity was required.

“The grass is so damp with the dew,” suggested Ray, “and if this poor woman lies here much longer she will die. Do you think if we rowed her down to the nearest cottages that they would take her in?”

“We can but try. How far off are they?”

“Past Willow Island, and even then you have to cross a couple of fields to get to them. Shall you mind?”

“Not at all. I am used to late hours. But you?”

“I told Janet, and she did not mind as I was with you.”

They lifted the woman into the boat between them, and then taking up the sculls moved swiftly and silently away.

Past the willows, and reeds, and irises. Past the Fairies’ Beech and the shivering aspens, whose silver leaves rattled drearily as they shot by them. Past banks that in day-time were alive with bees, and birds, and fish, but now everything slept, and

there was a still ghostly look over the familiar objects, as if the witching spell of the moon had cast some weird uncanny influence upon them.

Ray indicated the landing-place, and they pulled up.

"You must cross two fields," he said, "and then you will come upon a cluster of cottages, eight or nine together. They are tenanted, John says, by people who work in a paper-mill about a mile distant across country."

"I will do my best to find them," said Forbes.

"If you go straight from here, you will see a stile before you, and when once you are over that it will not be difficult. Now the hedge hides them, but in the earlier part of the evening you can see the chimneys, and the smoke rising from them."

It was Ray's turn to watch, but the time did not seem long to him, for his thoughts were full of the poor friendless creature who had dragged herself down, weak, and ill, and weary, to die where

at least she could hear the cool lapping of the water, and smell the freshness of the swiftly flowing river.

Forbes after a while appeared, with many apologies for having been such a long time. He had tried each cottage in turn and had despaired of success, for the people all worked at the paper-mills, and those who were left to mind the house were either young, or had their hands too full to be responsible for the charge of a sick woman. At the last cottage, however, he met with better luck. A mother and daughter lived together, the daughter worked at the mill, and the mother stayed at home to look after things. They were very poor, and thankful to earn such an addition to their store as the money Forbes proffered. The mother was not too old to wait upon the sick woman, and Forbes was careful to say that the money should be paid weekly, that he or Ray might see that she was really taken care of and properly nursed.

Forbes engaged some men to carry her to the cottage, and they left her safely in the hands of the mother and daughter, who seemed nice, upon the whole, though Ray was shocked at the apathetic and matter-of-fact light in which they evidently regarded the sufferings of the poor woman. He had not learnt how common such suffering and poverty is to those whose lot is cast in the midst of it. It is their normal state, and it is no wonder their natures harden and apathy ensues. If they were as sensitive as gently nurtured people, their lives would be short indeed.

It was an immense relief to Forbes to find himself once more in the boat alone with Ray, and the woman safely disposed of. At one time he had almost thought he must have taken her before him upon his horse, and thrown her upon the hospitable care of Mrs. Irvine, of whom he was a great favourite, perhaps because he was so impenetrable.

“I shall leave the money in your hands, Ray,”

he said, "or rather, I shall make arrangements for it to be sent to you quarterly, for if she lives I should like to allow her a certain sum. I am going home for three days, to-morrow, and upon my return we will go together and see her. Afterwards—" and he paused.

"Shall not you be staying here much longer?" asked Ray, for Forbes had not before talked of leaving until Mrs. Irvine left. He liked that part of the country, he had said, it suited him. His mother had been gone some time.

He did not answer, but threw back his head and looked into a sky as brightly, deeply, darkly blue as ever the far-famed Italian skies.

"No," he said, after full five minutes' silence, when Ray had forgotten having asked the question, "I shall not be—here—much longer, Ray."



CHAPTER VII.

SHADOWS.

“Thou camest not to thy place by accident,
It is the very place GOD meant for thee.”

FORBES Dunbar went home because he felt his mother must be the first to be told of the change that he was about to make. The journey was a long one, and he arrived late in the evening, unexpected too, but none the less welcome. They were sitting together in the firelight, after dinner—for the evenings were chilly, and his mother loved an excuse for a fire—when he broke his news gently and tenderly to her. He had exchanged into a regiment going to the Cape, in order to see some active service, and he would leave England

in a month from that time. He had not known that he could exchange into that particular regiment until the day before, and then he had come off at once to tell her.

His mother sat silent, feeling the news too deeply for words. The cheerful logs crackled and blazed, the light from them dancing merrily over the well-remembered furniture, and the scent of her son's cigar was wafted across to her. Would those happy evenings be at an end for ever? and would that golden head opposite to her, leaning thoughtfully back against the chair, soon be lying low upon the battle-field, trampled out of shape by horses' hoofs, his dear face stained and dyed with his life-blood? She covered her own face with her hands, and shuddered at the bare remembrance.

"Oh, Forbes," she said, "why need you have done this? Think what a comfort you have been to me all these years, and now you are going to leave me. Not only that, but oh, Forbes! if you should *never come back again!*"

He crossed over, and knelt beside her.

“ Dear mother,” he said, taking her hands from her face and kissing them, “ if I had been an only son I should have hesitated ; but you have Robert.”

Yes, she had Robert, a most amiable and exemplary son, but this one beside her was the youngest and the best-beloved. Lazy and indifferent, but never indifferent to her, where he had gone she had gone, making a home for him, and most tenderly repaid by his love and devotion. Robert ! ah, Robert was—Robert, but Forbes was dearer, how much she did not care to confess even to herself.

It is impossible to love people alike, and those who talk of levelling the affections and loving all alike, most often end in caring for themselves alone. Some must be dearer to us far than their fellows, and there is a Heaven-sent attraction about some people which binds us closely to them through time and through eternity.

“ *Why* have you done this, Forbes?” asked his mother, wistfully.

“ Have I not wasted enough years of my life?” he asked gently, “ and now at the eleventh hour, if GOD will accept me, I have wakened up to the knowledge of my duty. Dear mother, do not make it harder for me.”

She drew his golden head closely to her and kissed it, as she had been wont to kiss it when he was a baby-boy.

“ You have never given me pain, you have always been such a good son to me,” she murmured.

“ And you must pray that I may be a good son to my country,” he said cheerfully. “ Do not be downhearted, dear mother. Many go forth to battle after battle, and return to their homes again.”

“ Yes, and many do not return at all,” she said, catching her breath with a sob.

He did not answer, his lips closed firmly, and an earnest look settled in his eyes. *If* he did not return at all? What then? Ray’s song floated

softly through the room, and burnt into his brain and heart.

“When I awake up after Thy likeness, I shall be satisfied with it.”

They talked together until late into the night, and Forbes promised, that in making the necessary arrangements for his departure, he would not be absent from her longer than he could help, so that a farewell visit of two clear days was all he allowed himself for the Hermitage.

The first afternoon he went over to the Old House by the River to tea, and he and Ray rowed down in the evening to the cottages, to see how the poor woman fared.

They found her better, mother and daughter were both kind to her, and she seemed to improve a little each day. Still, even if she recovered, she would not be fit for work, except perhaps work now and again, and that of the lightest description. Forbes had already decided she should be his charge, and he lightened her troubles by telling

her so, and setting her mind at rest. She could talk sufficiently to make her story clear to them. It was simple enough.

She had been married to a farm labourer who died, and left her destitute. Her only other relation, a brother, was clown in a travelling circus. This same circus employed her to take the money, and do odds and ends of work. This lasted for some time, until one inclement winter she caught a severe cold, and from not being able to nurse it, grew very ill. She was such an encumbrance then, that it ended by their putting her out at Stopford, through which they were passing, and telling her to go to the Workhouse Infirmary to be nursed, and that upon their way back, some weeks later, they would inquire, and if she were better, give her her old employment again.

But with the usual dislike of the poor to the workhouse she had preferred living in the fields, begging a few crusts and broken meat from house to house, sleeping under hedges, until, at last, one

evening she felt so ill she thought she must die, and devoured with a burning thirst, from the rheumatic fever which had taken possession of her, she dragged her aching limbs down to the river to quench her thirst, and die beside the refreshing cool of the water. It was there Forbes and Ray found her.

They quitted the cottage, happy in thinking the poor woman would be better cared for, for the remainder of her life. As they rowed home they were unusually silent, each occupied with his own thoughts. I think it is the perfection of friendship, to be able to be silent for a while, if so it pleases you. Forbes was the first to break that silence, looking straight at Ray as he spoke.

“Do you remember, in our last row down the river, I told you I should not be much longer here?”

“Yes.”

“I could not say more than that then, for I wished to tell my mother the news first. I have

exchanged into a regiment going to the Cape, which will probably see some active service, and I leave England for Africa in a little more than a month's time."

Ray's face flushed, his eyes opened wider, and shone with an unusual excitement.

"How I envy you," he cried passionately. "You are going out into the world and can do great deeds. Fight for GOD and the right, help those who are in trouble ; take the part of the defenceless, and oppressed, and the weak. *Oh ! how I wish I were going with you.*"

This excitement in the usually composed and quiet boy startled Forbes. He had never seen Ray so carried away before.

"Stay," he said. "Look at the matter calmly. I am only going to do my duty after neglecting it for so many years. And as for the battle for 'the right,'—ah ! well, Ray, I have lived many years longer in the world than you have, and I am afraid I cannot always hold England 'right'

in her policy with foreign powers. I have nothing to do, I am thankful to say, with the declaration or non-declaration of war. As I am a soldier I have only to obey implicitly, and follow where my superior directs that I shall go."

"I have read so much about it," answered the boy, "how the knights went forth in olden time to succour the oppressed, do battle for the right and win their gold spurs by deeds of gallant daring, and I have longed to do the same now."

"I understand, substituting for the gold spurs the modern equivalent, the Victoria Cross. But consider the difference in our ages. You are fifteen, I am thirty-six. And I have only now wakened up to the thought of duty and its necessity. My life has been wasted—a mere idle dream and nothing more. Now your duty seems to me clear at present. A soldier's is obedience, surely yours is obedience also. Obedience to your father and his wishes. The rest will come in GOD's own good time."

"Yes, I have thought that," said Ray wistfully, "but the longing is stronger than myself—sometimes."

"Then look upon me as your true knight sent forth by you," said Forbes smiling. "For it was really the words you sang in the music room at the Hermitage which changed the current of my life."

Ray flushed scarlet.

"They set me thinking. They answered a feeling I had had for years, which almost drove me wild. A longing, a yearning for something, what I could not tell. Nothing satisfied me. I have the feeling still at times, but I know the answer to it now, and though it is pain, it is no longer unrest."

"It was through that same feeling," said Ray, "that I composed the music to those words. It helps me when I play it."

"Yes, and it set me thinking, and I saw that if we are to have a perfect satisfaction *there*, it can only be through the path of duty *here*."

“Yes.”

The lights in the windows of the Old House by the River shone a friendly welcome upon them from the semi-darkness of a dull autumnal evening. Ray accompanied Forbes to the stables for his horse and saw him ride off. The minutes with his friend now were precious indeed.

The next day was Forbes' farewell visit. He had tea with the children in their own room, looking out upon the view he had grown to admire as much as they themselves—that silver, shining river winding among its picturesque banks clothed with life and verdure.

Afterwards they all crossed the copse and went into the church for some music. The sun was much lower in the heavens than the afternoon upon which Ray had composed his song, and the little stiff saints in their niches were left grey and unflecked with warmth and colour. If you watched those saints for long you could almost fancy they were watching you, and you would

grow to wonder whether, within those breasts, over which their carved hands were so meekly folded, there was not some mighty knowledge hidden ; the secrets perhaps of many of those who had knelt and worshipped in the seats beside them. Did they know, as the party filed in that afternoon and took their seats in nooks and corners, that soon, ah ! how very soon, they would be scattered ; some in Paradise, some at the other side of the world ?

Ray's song was the last, by a special request from Forbes. Afterwards they all remembered that it had been so.

He said his good-byes outside the garden door, upon the banks of the river.

Denys said he hoped he would have a good deal of fighting. Miles wished for an assegai when he came back. Enid said they should often think of him, and miss the pleasant afternoons when he had ridden over and had had tea with them, and she wished him a happy and safe re-

turn. Cecily said she hoped he would be very successful, and come home covered with honours —the V. C. among them.

He promised her he would do his best, and turned to Hope. She could speak no word, only held out her hand, and it caused her the severest pang she had suffered yet when she found he did not miss her GOD-speed, did not notice the omission, or ask for a good wish. She saw and heard the remainder, as one in a dream, and wondered dumbly how much hearts could bear and not break. He bent down his golden head when he came to Ray, and pressed his lips upon the boy's, for he loved him as a brother. And only Ray knew how, beneath that soft moustache, the lips trembled and quivered. He lifted his hat to all, mounted his horse and rode slowly off, turning at the farthest bend where they could see him to wave a last farewell to Ray, who went back into the church as soon as he was out of sight.

“I wonder if he was sorry to go,” said Cecily.

“Why should he be?” said Hester. “I am sure it is very nice for him. If I was a man I would go too.”

“He looks different somehow,” said Enid, thoughtfully.

“Grave?” said Cecily.

“Yes, very grave, but he is always that. That was not what I meant.”

“I know,” said Cecily, quickly. “He has lost that don’t care, bored look he had when we first saw him at the Hermitage.”

“Yes. Hope, do you remember what you said about him then?”

There was no answer. They all looked. In the general talking Hope’s silence had been unheeded, and she herself had quietly stolen away.



CHAPTER VIII.

JABEZ STRONG.

“Lessons are in diamonds; which the more closely cut the more brilliant and varied is their phasis.”

“I TELL you, you have come to the wrong house. And if you won’t believe me, I can’t waste any more of my time in telling you.”

“And I tell you I’ve had my orders, and I can’t go agin them. ‘You take this to the Old House by the River,’ Mr. Jackson says, ‘and,’ says he, ‘don’t be longer nor you can help, for I want you back agin.’ Here it is in black and white, and if ye read it you’ll find it kur-reck.”

“You must have made a mistake, it isn’t for us

Be off about your business, and don't hinder me. I've no time to listen to idle tales."

"I've a bit of a note somewheres, from Mr. Simpson the magistrate. P'raps that will explain it."

Janet and a policeman were having this altercation at the back door, the policeman holding out a large official document which Janet refused to take. When, however, after some fumbling in his pockets, he produced a note plainly directed to "G. Forrest, Esq.," Janet was obliged to give in, however incredulous she still continued to be.

"And why couldn't you have given me that letter at once, instead of letting me waste all these words upon you?" she said snappishly, and holding the corner of her apron out she took the note from the man and walked into the kitchen to read it, leaving the policeman outside with the larger document still undelivered.

That the note was connected with something unpleasant there was little doubt in her mind.

But she soared no higher than a possible unpaid bill, though so far as she was concerned she tried to pay their way regularly, for she had a wholesome horror of debt. She had full authority from her master to act for him in everything connected with the house and its expenses, and she had no scruple in putting on her spectacles, breaking the seal, and sitting down to read the note. The contents took her breath away. Mr. Simpson, one of the magistrates of Stopford, the nearest town, was the writer, and he briefly stated that a ticket-of-leave man, Jabez Strong, was in the hands of the police upon suspicion of having stolen some valuable jewels, diamonds and opals, which had evidently been the setting of a miniature portrait or locket. He had tried to sell the jewels to Mr. Lawrence a jeweller, who had, however, had him arrested upon suspicion. The police had great difficulty in capturing him, for he fought desperately, and injured two of them. He persisted in declaring that the jewels had been given to him

by a young gentleman of the name of Raleigh Forrest, who lived in the Old House by the River, and that they had been given to him to sell, for the purpose of procuring food and a doctor for his sick wife. The examination of Jabez Strong was to take place the next day, and they were obliged to subpoena Mr. Raleigh Forrest to appear as a witness to contradict the man's absurd story, and also to explain how and where the jewels were missed, should they belong to Mr. Forrest or any member of his family.

The moment Janet glanced over the note she saw that it was true, and going quickly out, she took the subpoena from the policeman's hand, saw him safely off the premises, and came back to think the matter over.

The jewelled setting belonged to Ray, of that there was no doubt. The choice had been theirs, about three years back, of something from their mother's treasures as a special remembrance of her. The portrait was amongst them, for Mr. Forrest

possessed a better likeness of his wife, which he had had mounted in a locket, and wore constantly. Enid and Cecily had been caught by a shimmer of gold and white, for Enid had chosen a set of yellow topazes, Cecily a set of pearls, so the portrait had been left for Ray; and Janet remembered how he pounced upon it at once, as if afraid that one of the others might have a longing for it too, and how he had pressed it to his lips when once he had gained possession of it.

And there was no doubt in Janet's mind but that Mr. Simpson was wrong in his conjecture, and that Ray had of his own free will given away the jewels to Jabez Strong for the use which the letter mentioned. It was just the very thing Ray would do. Nor did she blame the boy, even in her thoughts. The whole family had grown into the habit of looking at what Ray did and said as being peculiar to himself, but perfectly right. Janet did not blame the action, but she regretted the consequences.

Directly the Forrests returned from boating, Janet waylaid Ray, took him aside, and told him the story. He read the letter, and his face grew pitiful.

“It is all my fault,” he said with tears in his eyes. “It is I who have brought this trouble upon that poor man; and there is his wife alone, perhaps dying. Janet, I will go off at once, tell Mr. Simpson the truth, and he will let the man out of prison.”

“No,” said Janet, “I have asked John, and he says the man must stand his trial. The examination is to-morrow, Master Ray, dear, and it is only one night more in prison, and being a ticket-of-leave man it won’t hurt the likes of him. It isn’t as if he was an honest man and had a character to lose.”

Ray turned upon her, his gray eyes dim with sympathy, his sensitive lips quivering.

“But, Janet, do you not see that that is just the very thing that makes it harder for the poor man? If he was honest, people would believe him, but no

one now will trust him, or think that he is speaking the truth, and yet—and yet he may mean to be honest and truthful, just as much as you and I, Janet. Oh! there can be nothing harder to bear than the knowledge that no one believes in you, no one trusts you. It is enough of itself to drive people into doing wrong. Oh! Janet, I think it is a very cruel world—for other people."

Janet soothed him as she had soothed him when he was a child, forgetting for the time that he was growing to man's estate.

"Hush, dearie, hush! Don't fret over what you can't help. There's nothing carries one to one's grave so quick as fretting. It knocks many a nail into a person's coffin. I'm not over in love with the world myself, Master Ray, dear, but there it is, and we must make the best of it."

"At any rate," said Ray, throwing his head proudly back, "I can tell them all how much this poor man was misjudged, and prove his innocence to those who have doubted him."

"And don't go worrying yourself any more about it, or you'll not get a wink of sleep to-night, and look like a ghost, or the ghost of a ghost to-morrow. You'll do all you can to set it right, and don't think no more about it."

He promised dreamily he would try to sleep, and Janet's eyes followed him wistfully as he walked off.

"He's got the heart of an angel," she spoke her thoughts aloud, "but I wish for his own sake it was a trifle harder. He lives half-a-dozen lives to other people's one. Well, I hope it will end all right to-morrow."

Ray would rather have gone alone to Stopford, but the family insisted upon accompanying him, when Janet told the story. Indeed, Miles would not be pacified, fearing lest some great harm would happen to his dear brother, unless he was there to see fair play, and Denys got up at sunrise to walk over to the Hermitage at the request of the girls, to beg that Hope would meet them at Stopford.

She had seen so much of the world that her company would be a help and a comfort to them.

Jabez Strong stood in the dock, but surely only Ray, half of whose soul was in the land of chivalry and the other half in heaven, could throw any glamour of romance around him.

His face was of the lowest type of human nature, with coarse hair nearly meeting his eyebrows, small eyes set very close together, a wide mouth, overhanging upper lip, and receding chin. He was dressed in a suit of corduroy, and wore a bright red neckerchief knotted lightly round his short, thick neck.

The evidence of the jeweller, Mr. Lawrence, was the first taken. He identified the man as being the one who had brought the jewels to his shop —three diamonds and two opals, and asked him to buy them. He said they were starving, his wife dying, and that these jewels had been given him, instead of money, by a young gentleman who told him he could sell them and buy the necessaries

of life and procure a doctor. Mr. Lawrence disbelieved the story and taxed the man with having stolen them. Jabez Strong swore fiercely and demanded the jewels back, but Mr. Lawrence kept them in his grasp and refused to part with them. Strong was preparing to snatch them by main force, when, a policeman happening to be passing, Mr. Lawrence called for help. Strong dashed out of the shop and was half-way up the street before the policeman realised what was required of him.

Mr. Lawrence's description of the prisoner however was sufficient to ensure the capture of Strong before he could quit the place, hampered as he was with a sick wife and child. The police tracked him to a damp cellar in a close, back street, and they described the difficulty they had had in capturing him, for he fought like a wild cat. Two of the policemen had their heads bound up, and Strong's eyes rested upon them with malicious satisfaction, while a snarl—meant for

a smile of delight—distended his mouth from ear to ear.

Next came Ray, and upon him Strong turned savagely—a wild animal brought to bay. We all judge others by ourselves, and as Strong's view of matters was of the narrowest and lowest description, he had come to the conclusion that he had been caught in a trap, and that Ray had given him the jewels merely to bring him into trouble, and revenge himself upon him for the beating Strong had given him.

Strong's look of hatred was lost upon Ray, who was only intent upon proving the innocence of the man, who at that moment hated him with so deadly a hatred, that had he had the power he would have slain him upon the spot.

The usual forms were gone through, and then one of the magistrates said,

“Your name?”

“Raleigh Forrest.”

“Your age?”

“Fifteen.”

“Were these jewels ever in your possession?” and the magistrate held up the setting, battered and bent out of all shape, for Strong was too cunning to attempt to sell it as it was, and had forced from it a few of the jewels, the ones he had taken to Mr. Lawrence and offered for sale.

Ray looked at the jewels and answered,

“Yes.”

“They are family jewels, I presume, from the style and antique setting?”

“They were my grandmother’s.”

“When were they stolen from you?”

“They were never stolen from me,” and Ray’s voice clear and distinct rang through the room. “They were given by me to the man Jabez Strong who stands yonder.”

The story had floated about, how that one of the sons of the mysterious and eccentric Mr. Forrest, who inhabited the Old House by the River, was implicated in that day’s proceedings. It was market-

day too, and the court was thronged with idle people, mostly ladies, some country, some town, who came out of curiosity to see what Mr. Forrest's son was like. This answer of Ray's took the magistrate and audience by surprise, indeed the former repeated his question sharply and received the same answer, this time, if anything, in a voice clearer and more emphatic. After whispering together the magistrates came to the conclusion that the boy was half-witted, and the same opinion seemed prevalent in the court, for a titter ran through it, which was however entirely lost upon Ray. From the moment that he had entered the witness-box he had forgotten himself entirely. His heart and soul were possessed with the divinest pity for the repulsive man whose innocence he had come to prove. Repulsive he was, but also a human being made in the likeness of GOD—one of those mysterious “other people,” who so strangely mingle sometimes in our lives—a man in whom no one but Ray believed, “whose hand was against

every man, and every man's hand against him." Before the magistrates had decided what course to take, Ray spoke again, bravely and firmly.

"I came across the Strongses—by accident. The wife was starving and ill—dying I thought from want of food and a doctor's care. I had no money, for we are poor, and I gave them these jewels thinking they might sell them, and get money with which they could procure the help they needed."

"They begged of you, I suppose," said one of the magistrates contemptuously, "and when you had nothing to give them the man no doubt threatened you, and under fear of his threats you were induced to bring him these valuable jewels. I hope they were your own to give away?"

Truly these nineteenth century days are very different from the ages of chivalry and romance, when even a boy's honour could not have been traduced and trampled into dust with impunity. It was like talking to a girl, a poor weak girl, who

could do nothing in self-defence but give in, and so save herself. Ray flushed a deep red, and for full a minute made no answer. When he spoke, it was gently, but firmly.

“The jewels were quite my own, to do with them as I pleased, and the man used no threats.”

Round Jabez Strong’s brain had been gradually working the knowledge that Ray was innocent of the scrape into which he had fallen through his own audacity, when driven by want to desperation he had offered the jewels for sale, and a dim sense of justice made him break in, loudly and fiercely.

“No, I’ll stan’ by ‘un and say he’s no coward. He’s a plucky ‘un, he is, he took his—”

“Silence,” said the magistrate. “You are here to be tried. Silence, I say.”

“I am sorry that I gave the jewels,” said Ray, turning to the magistrates in general, “as they have brought this poor man into such trouble. I did not mean to bring suspicion upon him. It was

my ignorance and stupidity which led me astray. You must pardon me that I have caused so much trouble. I did not mean it. I did not know what I was doing."

There was a ring of such thorough manliness in this apology, gently as it was spoken, and in the quiet self-possession of the boy himself, that the magistrates looked somewhat foolish, and the one who had spoken the most contemptuously fingered the jewels shamefacedly.

But they would not give up their point. They happened, all of them, to hold the same theory, namely, that tickets-of-leave were not only injudicious, but absolutely wrong and injurious to the country. It had seemed such a splendid opportunity that day for them to air their opinion, proving it too by such a practical instance; they had hoped the London papers might notice it, and some good results follow, and their expectations had been torn into pieces and scattered to the winds by the romantic folly of an imaginative

boy, reared by the most crotchety of fathers. They would not give up even yet; the man was better in prison than out of it, and his daughter must be examined to see if she would give corresponding evidence.

She was sharply questioned, and roughly handled, but the Sue whom Ray had shielded had seen strange sights, and been accustomed to rough usage in her short ten years of life. And she remained stolid and unshaken throughout. She was just as miserable looking as on that summer's night, full two months ago, that Ray had borne her beating. She had made a step in the right direction though, for she had evidently attempted to wash herself cleaner, but as she had only succeeded in doing it in streaks and patches, the effect was ludicrous.

“How does your father live?”

“By what he can git.”

“What do you mean. Does he *steal*?”

“No. By what jobs he can git give him.”

“When did the gentleman standing there give these jewels to your father?”

“Two days arter Stopford fair.”

“Why did not your father try to get rid of them before, to sell them?”

“’Cause he were afeard.”

“Afraid? Of what?”

“Of the perlice, ’cause he thought that they’d think he’d a-stolen of them, and he hadn’t.”

“Then why did he sell them at last? Now, speak the truth” (sharply.)

“’Cause we were well-nigh clemmed.”

“Your father had reason to be afraid of the police. And what have you lived upon these two months? What has your father done to get food for you and your mother to eat?”

“Farmer Stubbs give him some harvesting, and we scraped along upon that somehow.”

“How did Mr. Forrest come to find you out?”

“Eh?”

“Are you deaf? I asked you how it was that

the young gentleman, who gave you the jewels, came to find you out?"

"We were camping out," said Sue, speaking fast and low, "as we allus do in the summer, and father was a-thrashing of me one evening, and the young gentleman heerd me hollering, and he came running along, and asked father not to beat me."

"And your father left off beating you?"

"He said he'd finish it out another time."

The magistrates were deeply interested. They began to think they might make a case of it yet. The boy evidently bribed the man not to beat the girl, by giving him the jewels.

"What happened then? speak out, Susan Strong. Don't be all night over it."

"The young gentleman said he would be beaten for me, and he axed father to thrash him instead of me."

"And your father did?"

"Yes, he give it him pretty hard, he did. And the young gentleman did not cry out, not once he

didn't," with notes of admiration in her shrill voice.

"Well spoke up, Sue," said her father. "I'll keep my word to the gentleman yet, and I'll not thrash you again."

"Silence!"

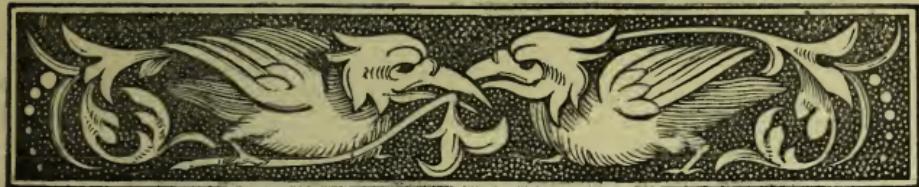
An audible laugh ran through the gay throng assembled there. To them it was a matter of amusement only, that a boy in a gentleman's rank of life could be found who would allow himself to be beaten to save a dirty, ragged, uninteresting child, from what was, no doubt, a well deserved punishment. The thought filled them with surprise, and was in their sight a fitting subject for ridicule. They fluttered their fans, chattered and tittered over it, and thought nothing of the pain they were causing the sensitive boy who stood with pale cheeks flushing, lips quivering, as some of the remarks fell upon his ears.

But here Ray's noble nature asserted itself again. He quieted himself by a strong effort, lifted his

head, and remained composed and tranquil under the fire of eyes directed at him : and the unflinching yet gentle manner of the boy, whose pure, pale, earnest face seemed more in heaven than on earth, commanded some respect from them, even as they laughed him to scorn. And as they trooped gaily out into the autumn sunshine, there were a few who longed to go to him, and shake him by the hand, to atone for the rudeness which he must have heard.

Jabez Strong was sentenced to a month's imprisonment for assault upon the two policemen, and the jewels were given back to Ray. He managed to tell Strong that his wife and child should be cared for during his imprisonment, and then, when the others joined him, he drew Enid and Hope aside and asked their advice concerning the disposal of the disputed jewels. Hope seeing many inquisitive lingerers, proposed they should take a walk and consult together how to help the man.

It was two months ago that Ray had stretched out his hand to pluck the red Rose of Charity. Surely he could add two other flowers to his nose-gay that day—the Violet of Humility, the Sweet-briar of Patience.



CHAPTER IX.

AN AFTERNOON TEA.

“ Yes, they are more our own,
Since now they are GOD’s only ;
And each one that has gone
Has left our heart less lonely.
He mourns not seasons fled,
Who now in HIM possesses
Treasures of many dead
In their dear LORD’s caresses.”

MRS. Irvine had driven into Stopford in her carriage, and the remainder of the Forrests returned with her. Hope said that Enid, Ray, and herself would go back in a fly later on in the afternoon.

That matter settled, they devoted themselves to the vexed question of the jewels. Hope, after thinking it over, suggested they should take Mr. Lawrence, the jeweller, into their confidence. He was evidently a respectable tradesman ; he would price the jewels for them, and perhaps advise them as to how they could best help first Strong's wife and child, and afterwards Strong himself, when he came out of prison.

They found Mr. Lawrence both obliging and interested. But he evidently was very loath that Ray should part with the diamonds and opals for the benefit of Jabez Strong. He held them quite tenderly in his hand while he praised the size and brilliancy of the diamonds and the pureness of the cloudy opals in which they were set. He advised the young gentleman to keep them, but if he was bent upon selling them, to bring them to him and he would give a fair price for them.

“ I shall have great difficulty in getting rid of the opals, though,” he said, smilingly. “ I do not

keep them in my shop now, for I find I have no sale for them."

"Why not?" asked Hope. "They are such a pretty stone, I always think."

"Yes," said the jeweller, "when they are good ones, as these are, they are beautiful to look into. There is such depth in them. But the reason I have no sale for them is because of the superstition which has gained ground of late years that they are so very unlucky. Opals and misfortune, people say, always go together."

"I did not know English people were so silly," said Hope, with a shade of contempt in her voice. "Why over our side of the water we think nothing of those things."

"And here it is just the reverse, for numbers of people who are superstitious over nothing else believe implicitly in the wearing of the opal bringing misfortune. But before you do anything about these jewels, Mr. Forrest, I wish you would go to our Rector and ask his advice as to how you can

best help Jabez Strong and his family. I will show you where he lives, and I am sure you will never regret having gone to him."

Mr. Lawrence conducted them to the outskirts of the town, to a house shut in on each side by high walls. He opened a small door in the wall that had neither bolt, nor bar, nor lock, and then left them.

The garden to which they were admitted was wild and uncultivated. The path leading to the house was covered with moss, but on either side were groves of trees picturesque with autumn creepers, shining hollies, mountain ash, shrubs, and berries of every description.

They rang the bell of what seemed to be the back door, but no other presented itself, and they were obliged to try this. The words they heard, as the door opened, were,

"Mind the books."

And the warning was needful, for Hope, who had turned quickly at the opening of the door,

caught her foot in a book and fell straightway upon a pile of them that were as near to the door as they could possibly be placed.

They followed the servant, an elderly woman in a high, stiffly-starched white cap, through several winding passages. The house seemed large and rambling, but large as it was it evidently was too small for the occupier, for the sides of the passages were lined with bookcases filled with books. At the end of a dark narrow passage their conductor pulled up, and knocking at a door until the answer was "Come in," she admitted them into the presence of the Rector of Stopford.

The room was only lighted by an oriel window of stained glass. The Rector sat in his easy chair, literally knee-deep in books. He was an old man, with snow-white hair, dark, deep-set eyes, and a kindly smile. He looked for vacant chairs upon which to seat his visitors, but there were none, they were every one piled high with books, and there was no space, if the books were cleared, upon

which to put them. There were narrow passages in which to walk, but that was all.

Hope, with the ready adapting of herself to circumstances which was her great charm, came to the rescue.

“Shall we hurt these large books, sir, if we sit upon them?”

“Not at all,” he answered, much relieved. “I often sit upon them myself when I want to catch the waning light.”

So they sat themselves down upon some ponderous flat volumes which fitted very comfortably into the recesses of the window. Then Hope, who was to be spokeswoman, explained their errand.

Everybody has some pet theory for which he is ready to fight to the death, and the Rector’s pet theory happened to be that there is no human being so utterly degraded but that there is some soft spot in them, responsive to higher and nobler instincts. And that if once this soft place is found, by patience and perseverance the whole moral na-

ture of the man is capable of undergoing a complete change and reformation.

Now here was a man of the lowest type, seemingly as hardened as any human being could well be. The Rector's dark eyes lighted up with the gravest and deepest interest ; he asked question after question, listened to remarks, and gave advice, finally promising that both the man and his family should be under his care, and that he would not lose sight of them until he was able to settle them comfortably and respectably. The question of money was rather a difficulty, for Ray was bent upon selling the jewels, and would have liked—as a recompense for the trouble he had brought upon the man—that the whole of the sum the jewels realised should be spent upon Strong and his family. But the Rector maintained that it was better to provide the family with necessaries, but only until the man could be put in the way of earning an honest livelihood, and that then it would be kinder to him to let him maintain himself and his family

by the labour of his hands. Nothing ruins people like idleness, and if Strong knew there was help to be had for the asking, he would not be likely to rouse himself to exertion, even though work knocked at the door.

So he argued, and at last won Ray over to see matters in the same light. It was settled the Rector was to use his own discretion, where the Strongs were concerned, and the remainder of the money was to be spent upon the sick poor of Stopford. There were many sick and suffering, he said, in that large, untidy, straggling parish of Stopford.

Then the Rector consulted his watch and rang for tea. They must stay and keep him company, for he always had tea about this time—and they were nothing loath to remain.

The next thing was to make room for the tea—a matter of ingenuity. They all set to work to help, the good old man chattering on meanwhile, as cheerfully as a child or a boy let loose from

school. They had a merry laugh over the clearing of the table, for, put the books where they would, they could only rest them upon other books, and as often as not they toppled over with a crash upon the top of other books, knocking those over in their turn ; and so soon as those were picked up, down would come another heap, and then those had to be picked up, and so forth.

It was the quaintest, and serenest, and happiest of tea-drinkings.

“ Well, we have had a good time,” was Hope’s remark, as they were going home, and the “ good” had an emphasis and a deeper meaning than she usually gave to it.

The Rector sat upon a pile of books to make tea ; Hope, Enid, and Ray sat upon books around the table ; and the tea was piloted to them through narrow spaces between the books. The tea-service was of the homeliest, the tea-pot of brown earthenware such as are seen in most cottages, the cups dark blue common ware,—the only wealth was the

wealth of books, yet all three felt they had never enjoyed anything as they did this most unique afternoon tea. The light from the oriel window fell upon them in gold, and rose, and blue, staining them with colour as it did the little grey saints in the old church by the river, and falling upon the Rector's white hair and kindly face as he hospitably and cheerily dispensed his tea and bread-and-butter.

“It is not often I have company to tea,” he said, “unless it is my boys. I am getting on in years. I passed my eighty-first birthday last Sunday. But I hope to keep to my work to the last, if it be GOD’S will. To wear out, not rust out, and to die in harness is my desire.”

“Is there much work?” asked Enid.

“Much. I get up at four in the summer, and five in the winter. Then I read and study. After breakfast I visit in the district until noon. Then read and study again. From seven until half-past eight I am always at home to everybody. They

all know this, and those who have any trouble or want anything come to me then, though of course in cases of necessity I can be seen at any time."

"Do many come?" asked Hope.

"They vary. Sometimes few, sometimes many. Last night I had seventeen visitors, each with a care or want. To-night perhaps I may have only two or three."

"Have you always lived alone?" asked Ray.

"Only the last few years. You would be surprised what a family of sons I have. Here are letters from some of them," and he put his hand upon a large pile of letters that stood by his side. "These came this week. I took pupils until I grew too old for the double work, and I believe each of my boys loves me as a father, and I love them as sons. It is quite a business answering their letters, I assure you. They write to me in their joys, sorrows, or difficulties, and come to stay with me whenever they have a holiday from their work, for they are all out in the world doing something."

Boys, do I call them ? ah ! they are still boys to me, though you, young ladies, would laugh at the bearded men I call my boys. I have had over a hundred from first to last,—many of them were boys without parents, whom their guardians sent to me, and to these you may be sure I feel the most closely knit. They all of them call me father. Some GOD has called to Himself, and are waiting for me in Paradise. Sometimes I feel set betwixt two stools. I should will, if the good GOD willed it, to be spared a little longer to those here who love and need me, but weary nature cries out for the rest that remaineth when the pilgrimage is ended. So many of my boys will be there to welcome the old man. Only the other day the youngest and the brightest of them—he was coming to stay with me, and would have been here now—wrote me a long letter to tell me of his doings. He was going by the night-mail to Scotland, and after that would be with me. I put the letter by my side, and the next morning sat down

to answer it. The post came in, I took up the letters, and the first I opened told me of his death. There had been a railway accident, and my boy was one of the victims. His death must have been instantaneous, thank GOD, for he lay—they told me when they wrote again—with a smile upon his parted lips."

The Rector's voice grew husky, and tears welled into the bright, dark eyes. He had been wont to call Alan Scott "the child of his old age," for he was his last pupil, the youngest, brightest, merriest. He had hoped great things from him too, for he was clever. The old man mourned him, even though he knew the time, at its farthest, could not be very long ere he and Alan would meet again.

The trio were silent from sympathy, and Ray was strangely interested. A colour was in his face, as was the case when much moved or excited, and *his* eyes were moist with sorrow for the old man's grief.

“ But I am saddening you,” said the Rector, rousing himself, “ and I do not wish to do that, for I should like you to come and see me again if you will. I hope this is only the beginning of a lasting friendship. You must come and have tea with me whenever you can spare the time. I shall be always glad to see you, and you will not grudge the hours you spend upon an old man.”

They assured him warmly that they would love to come, and he knew they were speaking the truth—and that the words came, as indeed they did, from the heart, and were not merely lip-words of civility.

“ I couldn’t have *anybody*, you know,” he said with a merry twinkle in his eyes ; “ I couldn’t ask any grand fashionable lady to come and have tea with me, and offer her a seat upon a pile of books. In the first place she would never get so far as the window, for there is no room for a sweeping train through those passages of books. No ! I can only have visitors who are compressible and

amenable, and you are both. Now, you will come again?"

"Yes," said Hope, "we will. Will next week be too soon for you, sir? Next Thursday?"

"Not a bit too soon. Then say next Thursday,—that will be this day week. I shall look forward to it. In the mean time I will do what I can for the Strongs; I will find them out at once, and move the woman into a better room and provide her with food. That must be done this very day, and next week, my boy," laying his hand kindly upon Ray's shoulder, "I hope I shall have a good account to give you of them. I will send my servant with a note to the doctor too, to ask him to call upon the woman so soon as he is at liberty to-day."

He acted as their pilot, not only to the door, but across the garden also.

"I cannot afford a gardener," he said, "and since my boys have gone Nature has been my gardener, and she manages very well for me. In the spring

I have a perfect carpet of violets, primroses, blue-bells, and ferns, in my little copse. Later on Marguerites, wild-roses, and honeysuckle. But it is in the autumn Nature has provided most liberally for me. There is every kind of berry you can name, virginia-creeper, clematis ; and here you see is a splendid tuft of pampas-grass which one of my many sons brought me. But I must not let you go without introducing you to my well. The boys call it saucily my *chef-d'œuvre*."

He led the way, and they followed, through a tangle of briars and brambles. In the innermost part of the copse where it was darkest was a rude natural well. There were some shallow steps leading down to it, covered with fresh, green moss and lichen. Close beside the steps grew the most brilliant scarlet fungi,—a splendid bit of colour against the cool green, and in the dim, tree-shaded light.

It was admired as much as even the old Rector could desire.

"The dear boys, how they teased me about it,"

he said wistfully, as he led them back and opened the door for them.

“Good-bye until next Thursday,” were his last words.

They turned, when they had gone some few steps, to wave a last adieu to the kindly face, framed now by a black skull-cap which covered the white, silky hair. And they chatted eagerly and gleefully upon their way home of the pleasant time they had had, and of the visit they would pay him the following week. Is it not better for us that GOD has so mercifully kept from us the knowledge of the future? That we cannot even tell what will happen to us from hour to hour? And they little knew, as they laughed and chatted, that two out of the three would see the old Rector's kindly face no more in this world.



CHAPTER X.

RAY'S CHAMPION.

“We maun dree our weird.”

THE day after Jabez Strong's trial, Miles appeared in the evening with a pair of undeniably black eyes. They were both so black and swollen that there was no doubt what answer would be given to the stern question of,

“How did you get them?”

“Fighting,” said Miles briefly, the pain was great.

“You bad boy,” said Hester severely, “I am ashamed of you. What did you fight about?”

But here Miles's lips were closed, and he would say never a word. All entreaties were in vain, no

more could be got out of him than that one brief word—fighting.

Janet was cross with him, and sent him to bed. He had to be kept out of his father's sight, and she told him that bed was the best place for boys who would take to fighting. He had a bad few days of it, poor little Miles !

The fight occurred in this wise. He had gone over to the Hermitage for cricket, and some of the boys playing happened to have been at the trial. They made great fun of Ray, for Denys was not there, and Miles was so small that they did not trouble themselves about him. But they had to learn that if Miles was small, he had a loving heart, and Ray he would defend with his life if necessary. A battle was fought, the boys having the fairness to choose the nearest in size to Miles, but even he was much bigger and older, and had learned to box with science, whereas poor little Miles had only right and love upon his side, and these, alas, had the worst of it in the contest.

It was strange that no one guessed the true state of affairs, except Hope Lifesay, and she, inquiring, found her conjectures were right. One day when Miles was allowed to appear, still, however, with his face in a very streaky condition, she called him aside, and imprinted a fervent kiss upon his cheeks, at the same time presenting him with a five shilling piece, brand new from the Mint. Miles had no idea why the kiss and bright money were bestowed upon him ; the former he rather resented, for he considered himself too old to be kissed, but the latter he accepted gratefully, for the Forrests, now they came to mix with "other people," sometimes felt the want of money, and Miles was as delighted with his tip as any boy of the same age would have been.

In a fortnight later the Hermitage would be vacant. Mr. Forrest received the news most thankfully. Lessons could be resumed, and old habits also, and the quiet life in the Old House by the River could flow on as peacefully as if no

disturbing outer influences had ever interrupted its even tenor. Only another fortnight, only two more weeks, two more weeks with the usual seven days in each of them.

It was the Wednesday after Jabez Strong's trial, and Enid and Ray were looking forward to their promised visit to the old Rector upon the morrow, when, after luncheon, Hope Lifesay drove over in the large old-fashioned family carriage with a request from Mrs. Irvine that the Forrests might return with her for a few hours. She would send them back in the carriage when it got dusk.

The day was a peculiar one. Thick, dark clouds had hung heavily about the sky the whole morning, yet no rain came, only the air was oppressively close. Mrs. Irvine laughingly told the Forrests that she had sent for them to cheer them all up, for every one was so gloomy, and over each of them hung a presentiment of coming evil. This feeling increased rather than diminished; the young people were infected by it, and even the

very animals, by some secret sympathy, seemed to understand it also, for the dogs crept about slowly, nestled closely to their mistresses, pricked up their ears, and whined occasionally. People moved languidly or sat dreamily about in the garden, and if a more venturesome spirit tried to be cheerful or lively, it was a spasmodic attempt and soon fell flat.

At sunset they stood on the terrace fascinated. No sun was visible, but bars of an intense blood-red shone angrily through the black mass of clouds overhanging the western sky. It was evident that a fearful storm was not far distant.

The house was deserted for the garden, even the servants turning out. Inside they could scarcely breathe, the air was so stifling and close. A weight—more than the atmosphere—lay upon them all, an oppression they could not shake off. There was little attempt at conversation, and the slow hours dragged wearily on.

It was the second week in October, and the evenings had been generally cold enough for fires,

yet that evening they stood or sat in the garden, lightly clad, gasping for breath. Everybody said it was a most unusual experience. It was as if the sky were descending upon them, as if they were wrapped round in hot, fleecy clouds, or as if they were caught in a furnace and entangled in cobwebs from which they could not free themselves. Mrs. Irvine detained the gardener as he was passing.

“ Martin, what do you think of the weather ?”

“ There’s a fearful thunder-storm on the road, mam. Such a storm as there hasn’t been in this country in my time, for I never felt so crushed beneath such a load of burning heat, nor did I ever see, afore this, such a curious sky.”

“ It would not be safe for the Miss Forrests and their brothers to return home ?”

“ It would be most unsafe, mam. Thompson would not take the horses out such a night as this is going to be.”

“ You hear,” said Mrs. Irvine, turning to Enid, who stood beside her. “ Now if Cousin Geoffrey

blames me for keeping you to sleep, you must explain to him that it was impossible you could go. The storm might come on at any moment, the horses would take fright at the thunder and lightning, to which they are not accustomed, and there would be a terrible accident. You have no choice, you *must* stay here, and I will arrange where we can stow you."

It was a relief to them to know they were not to go home, for they had been dreading the return. They had caught the infection of gloominess, and they were fearful. The Hermitage was unusually full, for a Mrs. Stevenson was there with five small children, and a Mrs. Mordaunt with three, besides several other ladies and gentlemen. Counting the servants there were about twenty-six people sleeping in the house, so it was like a puzzle to consider how six more could be put up for the night. But Mrs. Irvine was not easily daunted, and she soon made her arrangements and disposed of her new guests.

Enid and Cecily were to share Hope's room, in which there was a large sofa which could easily be turned into a bed, while Hester had a bed made up in a tiny dressing-room, leading out of Hope's room, and hardly larger than a cupboard. Ray was to sleep upon the sofa in the library, Denys and Miles in the day nursery, which was to be given up to them. The rooms in the Hermitage were not large, though fortunately there were plenty of them.

At eight o'clock they unwillingly went in doors for a late tea. But none of them could eat. Cups of tea were in demand to quench their thirst, but even the boys played with their knives and forks, and left the food untasted. They were glad to turn out again into the painfully still night air. Some of them wandered as far as the river for the chance of feeling its coolness, but even there it seemed as if the river was in harmony with the rest of nature. Even the waters that night moved as if life had gone out of them, and instead

of pressing cold and strong against the feverish hands dipped into them, trickled languidly through the open fingers, lukewarm and faint from the heat of the atmosphere. No one retired until past midnight, and then it was only to crowd to the wide open windows of their rooms, gasping for breath. Still the storm dallied, seeming shy of coming ; still the clouds gathered in one dark overhanging mass slowly swooping nearer, nearer to the earth, as if it were some bird of prey, hovering with outspread wing over its victim, so secure in its sure possession that it could afford a space of silence ere it struck.



CHAPTER XI.

AT THE DAWN OF DAY.

“Hear’st thou in the red morn,
The angel’s song?”

IT was not until between three and four o’clock that the dark clouds were torn asunder by a vivid flash of lightning, succeeded by a heavy roll of thunder. Then the heavens opened and the rain descended in a sheet, beating heavily and straightly upon the ground. The storm was a perfect torrent, but lasted only a short time, ceasing almost as suddenly as it had begun, though the lightning and thunder continued without any intermission.

The rain brought power to breathe and refreshing coolness, and some of the visitors in the Hermitage went to bed much relieved, while others stayed up to watch the storm. Of these latter were Hope and the three Forrest girls, who were grouped round Hope's window, Cecily and Hester rather in the background, for they were somewhat afraid of the lightning.

It was now the darkest hour in the night, and the flashes of lightning came at longer intervals, while the peals of thunder sounded farther off, when Hope suddenly started up and leaned out of the window.

"Come nearer, girls, and lean out. Is it my fancy, or do you smell a queer smell?"

The girls could smell nothing, and Hope rested content, thinking her sense of smell, which was peculiarly sensitive, must have deceived her.

"I think we had better go to bed," she said. "The storm has pretty well spent itself now, I guess. I never felt anything so deliciously

refreshing as that rain.—Oh ! girls, what is that?"

A thrill of terror ran through them all as they leaned out with ears strained to catch the next sound.

It followed quickly upon the first, a shrill scream as of some one in an agony. The girls clung together, their faces white with a nameless horror, which rendered them for the moment dumb.

A quick tramping of feet caused them to breathe more freely and unloosed their tongues. Then other screams succeeded, so pitiful that Hope wrung her hands.

"If we could only see," she moaned, "but it is so black, so black. The darkest hour before the dawn. Oh ! girls, stop your ears or you will never forget these screams. What *can* it be ? Is no one awake but ourselves ? Why haven't they roused the whole house by now ? The screams are away from the house, not in it. They have stopped. Ah ! here is some one coming," and leaning out

she called as clearly as her trembling voice would let her, "Who is there?"

"Is that your voice, Miss Lifesay?"

"Yes."

"It's me, miss: Thompson. The stables has been struck by lightning. Martin has gone for the engines, he rode one of the horses; but there's no engines nearer than Stopford, and it won't be safe for any of you to stay in the house, as the wind blows the sparks this way. Wake them all up, Miss Lifesay, please, and tell them to turn out as soon as they can. There's no desperate hurry, you understand, but there's such a sight of people in the house that the sooner they are out of it the better."

"What were those horrible screams we heard just now?"

"The poor horses, miss. They was terribly frightened, and no wonder."

"They seemed such human cries. Were the horses hurt?"

"No, miss. We have got them safe out."

"I can just see the flames," said Enid. "Look, Hope."

Through the dark trees the red flames were visible, blowing steadily, with what little wind there was, towards the Hermitage.

"Come, girls. We will take our candles, throw open the doors into all the rooms, and wake up the people thoroughly. I know the house, and it shall not be our fault if any one is left uncalled. GOD grant that we may all come safely out of this."

The wildest confusion soon ensued. Every one lost their heads when they turned out into the darkness, which was only from time to time relieved by the vivid flashes of lightning. People ran frantically to and fro, exclaiming that so-and-so was missing ; that Bobby or Totty would catch his or her death of cold ; that everything would be lost, and were the things insured ? and so on.

It really was a serious matter what to do with

the children, until Hope reminded Mrs. Irvine of a large roomy summer-house, some distance off, at the end of the kitchen garden. Mrs. Irvine caught at the idea ; the children were collected together, so far as they could be in the darkness and confusion, wrapped up in shawls, and sent with some servants and any one else who liked to go to the summer-house. But most of the visitors preferred to stay, fascinated by the terrors of the fire.

The men-servants and gentlemen were busy in saving what they could from the house, which had soon caught on fire, and so much of it being of wood, and that old, was burning steadily and quickly. The stables were unfortunately so near to the Hermitage, the wind set that way, and Stopford was so far off, there seemed little hope that the engines would arrive in time to do any good. The men worked with a will until they declared it was unsafe to venture into the house again, when they gathered upon the lawn and watched the progress of the fire.

All traces of the storm were swept away from the heavens, and to the relief of everybody the dawn was near. Already a narrow line of red was seen in the East, and it was light enough for them to distinguish each other, pale ghosts they looked in the morning mist.

“How quickly it burns,” said Hope, turning to Ray. “And the beams are falling in every direction ; listen to that heavy thud. Oh ! I am so thankful we are all safely out of it. Never mind the house now that every one is safe.”

The words were hardly spoken when a sorrowful wail, coming from the right-hand wing, the one as yet unburnt, startled them all into watchfulness.

The cries continued, sounding like the cries of a frightened child, who wakes up suddenly and finds itself alone, and in the dark.

Mrs. Irvine wrung her hands.

“It is impossible there can be anybody in the house. You called everybody, Hope ?”

“Everybody. Each door was thrown wide open, and every one was aroused. And I know each room in the house, and where they all slept. I did not overlook any.”

“And the most sound sleeper could not have slept through this noise and confusion,” said a Mrs. Leslie. “Dear Mrs. Irvine, do not distress yourself.”

But the cries continued instead of abating, and Mrs. Irvine’s lips grew white, for a servant suggested the very thought that had crept so unwillingly into her own mind.

“The nurseries are in that wing, mam ! could one of the little children have been left behind by accident ?”

She spoke low, and intended only her mistress to have heard, but unfortunately, Mrs. Stevenson, who was not far off, caught the whisper, and started forward.

“The children, oh ! my children ! It is my Mabel’s cry, the baby, the youngest of all. Nurse

must have forgotten her. I will give everything, all I possess, if somebody will save her. Will no one save my child ? Ah, she is crying again ! Oh, save her, save her !”

She was perfectly beside herself, and required two of the strongest of the gentlemen to hold her. She screamed, and begged, and entreated : while the pitiful cries continued unabated. Hope turned to her sternly and said,

“Mrs. Stevenson, I am sure you told me the children were all safe, and had gone down to the summer-house with the nurse. Now try and remember.”

“I kissed some of them, but I am not sure ; and I could not have kissed Mabel, or I should have remembered ; besides, that is Mabel’s voice, those are Mabel’s cries, oh, will none save my child ?”

“Denys has run down to the summer-house to see if the children are all safe.”

“And in the mean time she will be burnt to

death," and Mrs. Stevenson's cries and screams redoubled.

Ray could bear it no longer. He sprang forward to make the effort of going into the burning house.

Hope saw his intention and caught him.

"Let me go, Hope, there is no time to lose."

"At least wait until Denys returns. Oh, do, dear Ray."

"And by then it may be too late. Even now I do not know if it is possible, but I shall try."

She wished with all her heart, afterwards, that she had not loosed her hold of him, but if she had not done it, he would have broken from her. The Scotch proverb is true, "we maun dree our weird," whatever that "weird" may be.

He dashed into the burning house, and up the staircase where the smoke seemed to suffocate him.

If he had paused for a moment he could not have continued, as it was, he shut his eyes, dashed

blindly on, and upon reaching the landing, fell down senseless. He recovered and turned into the right-hand wing, which was as yet untouched by the flames, but the sparks were alighting upon the roof, and every moment rendered it more unsafe. He made his way to the top of the house from whence the pitiful cries came.

By this time, many strange people had seen the flames and had joined those upon the lawn. When it was known that Ray had gone into the burning house, anxiety was too deep for words. Enid, Cecily, Hester clung around Hope, who felt she wanted all her strength to support herself in these terrible moments. Even the mother hushed her cries, and turned with strained eyes to the blazing house.

They were all watching the door with beating hearts, not moving or uttering a sound, when a window thrown open in an upper story of the unburnt wing caused them to raise their eyes.

Ray stood at the window of a room in the second story, and in his arms he held—only a dog.

A little silver-grey Skye terrier who clung shiveringly to him, beating his soft, brown paws against Ray's shoulder, and whining, partly a whine of joy at his rescue, partly suffering still from the terror with which he had heard the roaring of the flames, and the falling timber around him. He slept in a basket in a linen-room upon the same floor as his mistress's bedroom; and she, in her fright, had totally forgotten him. She had not even remembered his existence until she saw him in Ray's arm. He had stayed quietly sleeping, until wakened by the unusual sounds of falling timber close beside him. Then, a dog's instinct told him that something dreadful had happened and that he had been left to his fate. He had sought, in his terror, the darkest corner of the room, and cowering down into it, lifted up his voice and wept loudly and piteously, sobbing like a child, and it was there that Ray found him.

They gathered close to the window, and Ray spoke, quietly and steadily.

“The flames have caught the main staircase, and I can get down no farther than this. The smoke drove me back. Can you get a ladder?”

There was a general rush for the ladders. But the Hermitage for many years had been let only for a summer residence, and was deficient in many things which would otherwise have been thought necessaries in a house of its size had it been lived in the whole year round. They brought one ladder, but only quite a short one, which was used for training the espalier trees, and it failed to reach the window by several feet.

“There must be another somewhere about; we could tie them together,” cried Hope quickly.

“That’s the only one there is to be seen anywhere, miss,—and Martin, he’s not here.”

“I must wait for the engines,” said Ray.

“Oh, no,” said Enid, “there must be another ladder. We will go and search.”

" 'Tain't no manner of use, miss ; we have looked everywheres."

" There's a short ladder down at our cottage," said a man present, and he ran off for it as hard as he could go.

The crowd upon the lawn increased, and was by this time frantic again,—some calling for ropes, ladders, fire-escapes, some running off to see if the engines were in sight, others crying and sobbing and wringing their hands. Poor little Miles' grief was terrible to see, and the others were hardly better. Ray was the calmest of any, and it was his voice that quieted Miles, and the little fellow at last stood underneath the window quite cheered and hopeful, saying every minute,

" The engines must come soon, must they not, Ray ? In another minute I should think they would be here."

The others too were quieter, but with more anxious forebodings in their hearts than Miles.

The second short ladder appeared, and was

seized with a shout of relief. Ray caressed the frightened dog absently, but did not otherwise move or speak.

Hope, assisted by some of the gentlemen, was directing how the ladders could be most firmly fastened together, so that there should be no chance of their parting asunder, when—happening for an instant to look upwards at Ray—her heart gave a sudden leap of terror, and told her the story ere it was completed.

His face was turned towards where, in the east, the sky was flooded crimson with the rising sun. The grey eyes, the pure straight profile, the very turn of the head, were full of a strange, pathetic yearning, the sight of which made Hope turn quickly away again, and she bent over the ladders to hide the bright tears which dropped fast upon them.

The last knot was firmly tied, and the ladders were being hoisted, when a glad cry echoed from lip to lip.

" Make room for the engines,—the engines are coming!"

" Oh, Ray, they are coming!" cried Miles, clasping his hands in ecstasy; while a pair of strong arms lifted the child out of the way of the clattering engines.

They galloped up the avenue, and it was scarce two minutes before men ran swiftly up a long ladder to the patient, waiting figure in the window over whose head the flames were now breaking, and around whom the timber had been crackling and falling from time to time.

" Take the dog, please," said Ray.

The trembling creature was quickly passed to some one behind, and then—Hope never quite knew how the rest happened.

The fire had penetrated to the room overhead, and a burning rafter struck the boy, ere the man had time to catch him in his arms.

It was over in an instant of time. Ray was carried down the ladder, and some one threw a shawl



hastily over the damp grass. Upon this they laid him gently—reverently.

Then for the space of a few seconds all stood as if they had been turned from living, breathing people, into motionless statues. The men bared their heads, and the most intense and solemn silence reigned—a silence in which Nature seemed to share, for the birds ceased their twittering, nor did the leaves of the trees rustle. Only the sunrise flooded the sky, the smoke and flames ascended to the heavens.

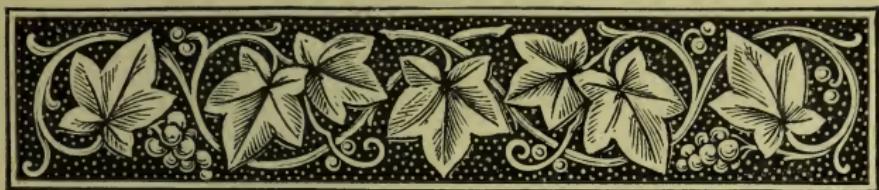
There was no sign of suffering upon the pure, pale face of the boy, only the tender, yearning look still parted the lips. Nor was there any visible mark of the blow. It had been a light one, scarcely ruffling the dark hair, but it had struck a vital part, and its work was done.

Miles sprang forward.

“ Ray ! why do you lie so still ? Open your eyes ! look at me ! Speak to me, Ray !”

The child put his warm, living arms round his

brother's neck, kissed his lips, and tried to raise his head to draw it towards him. But the dusky head fell heavily back, and Miles, with frightened eyes, looked into the faces, sad and sorrow-stricken, which were bending so pitifully over himself and his brother.



CHAPTER XII.

RAY'S SONG AGAIN.

“Music, that gentlier on the spirit lies,
Than tired eyelids upon tired eyes.”

MR. Forrest was an early riser when the beauty of the morning tempted him. Upon the one after the storm, he was up at sunrise watching the red light which flooded the entire east. He mounted the ground at the back of the house to see what havoc had been made in the night.

Nature was changing her dress daily, coqueting with yellows, and reds, and browns, trying which shade of colour suited her complexion best. The wood, that morning, was piled with her cast-

off garments, and the trees were beginning to look rather undressed—only the hollies shone fresher and fairer from the storm which had beaten so heavily upon them.

The birds flew to Mr. Forrest with pitiful stories the moment he entered the wood. They told him, twittering and chirping and making a grand bustle over it, what a dreadful night they had spent, and how some of them were homeless from the cruel storm: and sadder far, for they were left sound of wing and limb, how farther on in the depths of the wood, many of their friends lay upon the ground with broken wing, the white film gathered over their eyes; beaten down to the death by the relentless storm.

This they told him in their own language. But they could not whisper to him, nor tell him, whose eyes were then looking at the red sunrise for the last time, nor that one of his own birdies was even then trying its wings and soaring away, into the deep blue of heaven.

Geoffrey Forrest had tried to keep from him all sorrow and suffering, and aught that could jar upon a refined and sensitive nature. For the second time in his life the angel, whom we all dread, had gathered his dearest in his arms and flown with him to Paradise.

Ray was dearer to him than his five other children put together. Specially noble and winning as the boy's nature was, there was also much in it that sympathised with his father, and the two were closely knit together—like—yet most unlike.

The blow of his death stunned the father. He shut himself up in his study refusing to see any one, and rejecting any attempt that was made to comfort him. When the children saw him they were stricken with awe at the change that had passed over him. His hair had grown from dark to white, his back was bent, his head bowed down.

He spoke quietly and much as usual to those who brought his meals, but not more than 'yes' or 'no' if it could be avoided.

And what could those say who loved Ray best, except that it was better for the boy that GOD had called him home? His life could never have been long, for it would have worn itself out in a very few years, and what years of suffering those must have been to such an exquisitely sensitive nature, whose upbringing had only served to intensify the sensitiveness without attempting to show that there might be a remedy for the evils. It was better for the boy that he should be taken out of this world of pain, with its feverish struggles, to "lie at rest in the quiet earth's breast, his soul at home with GOD."

They chose his bed upon the sloping hill-side, where a little brook ran laughing down and scattered from side to side its crystal drops as it hurried over the stones; those crystal drops which kept the grass beside it fresh and cool even in the hottest summer days. And they chose the spot underneath the shadow of the old grey church, and as near to the organ as they could

get it. The organ at which he had set to music those words which were destined to sink into many hearts, to change the current of the lives of several—

“When I awake up after Thy likeness, I shall be satisfied with it.”

The town and country from far and wide sent a wealth of flowers for the boy, whose early death brought tears to the eyes of many who did not even know him. Those who had laughed at him, only the week before, tried by the magnificence of their offerings to wipe out the remembrance of their mockery. And they all lamented what they termed such “a dreadful waste of life,” for in their eyes he had thrown himself away, had given up his rich young boyhood, love and friends, years already full of promise of what the future might be, and by so doing had saved—only a dog! But GOD, Who looks at the intention before the deed, judged differently. Tenderly and truthfully the boy lived his life and held it to be saved or lost only

as GOD willed it should be saved or lost, and he soon found it again, this time so perfected, so full of entire satisfaction, that the loss was gain indeed.

They made his last bed most beautiful with moss and flowers, and he was laid in it just as the sun, slowly dipping into the west, touched the old grey church, as if with a parting blessing, ere it said farewell to the day. The yellow corn had long been garnered in, in the sloping field, and they lingered in the churchyard until the mists were gathered over the river, a tiny silver crescent hung out in the clear opal-tinted sky, and the evening star appeared where the sun had been. Then, under the quiet stars they left his body, though his soul had long since soared away to "where beyond these voices there is peace."

* * * * *

Mr. Forrest was an anxiety as the days wore on. He had sorrowed for his wife silently and alone, but he had not then shunned the society of his

children as he did now. He did not ask for them, and when he came across them by accident, he hardly noticed them. Janet feared, and the two elder girls were old enough to share her fears.

When their anxiety was greatest, little Miles, unknowingly to himself, came to their rescue. The boy had transferred to his father the love and devotion he had given to Ray. It seemed as if he could trace the likeness between the two, and so tracing it, clung to it. He took his book and sat by his father's side by the hour together, not speaking or obtruding himself in any way, and Mr. Forrest did not dismiss him. The two sat silent, the father not noticing him at all, but perhaps the child's companionship was not displeasing to him.

One afternoon Miles rose from his corner, put aside his book, and coming to his father, twined his arms round his neck as he had been wont to do to Ray when he wanted to be very coaxing.

“Father?”

“Yes.”

"I want you to come into the church and hear me sing Ray's song."

"What song?"

"A verse Ray made into music. I was in the church with him the afternoon he made it. He was a long time over it. I blew for him. But it was lovely music when it was finished. He taught me to sing it, at least he *began* to teach me, and Enid taught me the rest. Will you come, father? Enid will play for me, and Denys will blow."

"Yes, I will come."

"Thank you, father."

They all stole into the church, and sat about in different seats, even Janet and John, while the child sang to his father the song Ray had composed only three short months ago.

His voice lacked the richness and expression of his brother's, nor did it wake the echoes as Ray's had done. But it was a clear sweet child's voice, and it rose, like the song of a lark, amongst the arches straight to heaven.

Enid, Cecily, Hester, and Denys remembered when last they had heard it, and wept tears of gentle sadness. Miles was singing to his father, anxious to do justice to Ray's "beautiful music," and forgot everything but the song. The little grey saints in their niches looked on with folded hands, and calm content expressed upon their quaintly carved features. And as the last notes died lingeringly among the pillars, they seemed to bow their heads and say,

"With JESUS and the Saints."

The children crept out of the church as softly as they had entered it, leaving their father alone, with the remembrance of Ray, his music and the words.

Ray had caught the full expression and meaning of the verse, and chained it down to earth by imprisoning it in the notes of music. There was the sadness and the yearning, the plaintiveness and wistfulness of an unexpressed want, and there was also the glad triumphant certainty that some

time, but not now, that yearning void would be filled up, that restless longing satisfied.

Very dimly Geoffrey Forrest began to realise that GOD has placed us in this world, this prosaic nineteenth century part of it, not that we might shut ourselves away from all that is jarring, or repulsive, or unpleasant; but that taking our parts manfully among the "other people," we might share their burdens, bear their sorrows, and by so doing lighten our own.

Another thought also worked in his brain. That part of the suffering of our fallen nature is the yearning after perfection in ourselves, and others, and things around us. It is the longing for a perfection which will only be realised when awaking "*after His likeness, we shall be satisfied with it.*"

Though there are some who lie so near to the gate of Heaven that, being with them, we begin to understand what our satisfaction will be like when it is completed.



CHAPTER XIII.

BROKEN THREADS.

“ Dear dead ! they have become
Like guardian angels to us ;
And distant heaven like home
Through them begins to woo us ;
Love, that was earthly, wings
Its flight to holier places ;
The dead are sacred things
That multiply our graces.

“ They whom we loved on earth
Attract us now to heaven ;
Who shared our grief and mirth,
Back to us now are given.

They move with noiseless foot
Gravely and sweetly round us,
And their soft touch hath cut
Full many a chain that bound us."

IN a story, as in spinning, it is necessary to gather up the broken threads, to weave our material into a perfect whole.

Our broken threads now are,
Forbes Dunbar,
Hope Lifesay,
Jabez Strong.

Ray's loss made a terrible blank in the home circle of the Old House by the River, but not so much as it would have done in many others. For they seemed to feel him with them, though unseen, and more especially in his favourite haunts in the old grey church and upon the river. They talked of him constantly, always in the living, present tense, and not in the past, as is the case with most people. They did not draw closer together at meals, but left his chair vacant, where he once sat,

and always a vase with a flower or spray of leaves and berries in front of it upon the table.

The spring of the following year, a spring which was destined to bring sorrow into many homes, brought a fresh one to theirs. The mother's presentiment of ill was realised only too soon. Among the unnumbered heroes of Rorke's Drift Forbes's golden head lay low, with so many heaped around and upon him of the murdered and the dying, that unattended and uncared for his brown eyes closed in death. We speak so unconcernedly of England always being victorious in the end, and we do not pause to think, as we speak the careless words, at what a cost that end is attained. Each of the slain at Rorke's Drift left friends to mourn him ; and consider the numberless homes desolated, the countless hearts that were torn in two, when the news came of that terrible massacre. It certainly would seem as if that sad mistake of the Crimean war ought to be sufficient warning for a century at least, yet again and again we send forth

picked men, the flower of our English people, to pour out their blood like water against overwhelming numbers. Forbes died with no special record of bravery beside his name, but where all were so brave, and gallant deeds so frequent, that they were counted only common acts, who can single out one more than another and say he was the most brave? Forbes died as English soldiers love to die, a brave man and true, and he and his comrades died as, alas! they ought not to have had to die, for they fought against such fearful odds as made the battle simply a field of murder, surrounded as they were by their foes, shut in by four black towering living walls of relentless, cruel enemies. Their courage never failed, but they could only fight their bravest and die,—fallen but not conquered.

It is our comfort to think that no life is ever wasted which does its duty in the Eyes of GOD. It is He Who inspires our soldiers and causes England to win her battles, and we console our-

selves with the thought that man's mistakes, cruel as they seem, are GOD'S purposes, and that those forms which lie so motionless upon the battle-ground will be raised most fair in soul, most fair in body, to live for evermore in the love of GOD and of each other.

* * * *

Hope could not take back the love she had given, even though it had been given unasked, and she watched for the papers with an hourly increasing interest, while she eagerly scanned the war news to see if the name which she dreaded to see was among the fateful list. And she knew, so soon as his mother knew, that among the gallant 24th, who did its hopeless work so bravely and so well, her own hero had fallen in the unequal strife.

She had to lead her usual merry life of balls, picnics, assemblies of various kinds, when, for her, all the sunshine and pleasure had died out of them, and they became a treadmill which she dreaded and from which she longed to break free. She

had no one to whom she could tell her sorrow or show her grief, and perhaps she would utterly have broken down had it not been that when the need was sorest help came.

It came in the form of work. Her sister-in-law died, and her brother wrote to ask her if she would sacrifice her home and friends and make a home for his motherless children and himself in the far West. It was no sacrifice to her now, and she gladly packed up and went, wondering what her friends, who condoled and sympathised with her, would say if they could read her heart.

And when her day's work is over she stands at the window and watches the moon rise over the mountains and the stars appear in the deep blue sky, and then her thoughts wander at will among those she loves most dearly, both living and gone before, and ever associated with Forbes and Ray are the words she can, in memory, hear sung by a boy's voice with infinite pathos and tender yearning,

“When I awake up after Thy likeness, I shall be satisfied with it.”

And, like the Forrests, she feels the dead are very near to her in her quietest and holiest times, and she has a fancy that GOD, Who has given us hearts with which to love Himself and others, and Who loves us so much Himself that our sorrows are His sorrows—she has a fancy that GOD has perhaps allowed Forbes to know that she is among those who miss his place on earth and are looking for him in Paradise. It is a cold creed which would tell us that we shall not recognise each other in the world to come. Our loves, as all else, will be perfected there, and surely those we love most fervently on earth, and especially those whose intercourse has lifted us nearer to Heaven in this world, will be most fully recognised by us, and most fervently loved throughout the Eternal Years.

And Ray's song spoke comfort to yet another, for Forbes's mother, in looking over her son's

things, came across an old blotting book, inside which she found a scrap of paper with a date upon it, and underneath the date was written in pencil, "*When I awake up after Thy likeness, I shall be satisfied with it.*"

And after she had realised her son's faith and hope she was content to wait. Picturing to herself the glorious future in store for them, she lived her few years calmly, trustingly, until for her the morning broke and the shadows fled away.

* * * *

The story of Ray's short life would be incomplete if mention were not made of Jabez Strong.

Strong was keen enough to see, in his first interview with the Rector, that "the owld parson," as he termed him, was one to whom it was better to speak the whole truth, and that unreservedly..

He told, with candour, exactly the number of times he had been in prison and for what crimes. Some for thieving, and some for poaching. Ray's

money was used judiciously by the Rector, the wife regained her health, and the family were respectably clothed and fed.

Then came the question as to how they were to remain clothed and fed. They could be sent off as emigrants without doubt, but the Rector had not yet found the exact spot in Strong's moral nature where an appeal to higher things met with a response, and he did not like to lose sight of him as he was,—hopeless and unreformed.

The wife and child would be easily influenced if only Strong would allow them, but he ruled his family with a rod of iron, and until *he* was won his family must remain as they were, and the citadel be unconquered.

Amongst the pile of letters that crowded the Rector's table one morning was one which seemed to interest him unusually, judging from the time he sat with it in his hand.

It was the postscript alone which caused him so much thought.

"P.S. My keeper, poor old Markham, is dead. Such a steady, respectable man. Do you know any one who would be handy for the place?"

When the Rector sat down to answer the letter it was to ask that the vacant shoes of Markham might be filled by a man in whom he was much interested. And he briefly sketched the portion of Ray's life which had touched that of Jabez Strong.

The Rector was one of those people, and there are some such, for whom their friends will do anything, unhesitatingly, without asking questions, with perfect trust, and at once.

The answer, wired back, for the post was too slow, was a genial one.

"Send them at once. The house and furniture go with the place. They can step into it any moment. Only wire back when they are coming."

Now this boy of the Rector's, grown years ago to man's estate, was one of those he called his specials, those to whom, for they had no parents,

only guardians, he had been both father and mother. This young man had come of age a dozen years ago, and he was a respectable squire of a respectable village in the most respectable county in England. In fact it made up in tidiness and respectability for what it lacked in picturesqueness and beauty. What should we do if Nature were to turn suddenly tidy? If she were to smooth her hills into level plains, still the ebbing of the sea, send to bed the fleecy, baby clouds that nestle so lovingly upon their mother's breast, reduce angles and curves to straight lines, move into marching order the trees that stand about, tuck away the trailing ivies and creepers, snip off the autumn leaves as they change colour, as dead and worthless, trim the bearded barley, cut down all foliage to an uniform height, call each wild flower into proper line, arrange the pebbles at the bottom of the brooks until they form a level floor, check the silver cascades that catch and imprison the rainbow lights in their impetuous

descent, chide the sunbeams for dancing, straighten the windings of river and brook, rake the sea-weed into decorous heaps, and make bonfires of them upon the yellow sands, and rebuke the nightingale for singing when its fellows are asleep—oh what should we do if Nature were to be seized with a sudden fit of tidiness? The birds, beasts, and insects would go out of their minds, and we should have to build asylums in which to keep them.

Nature in this particular county had little in her own hands, and the little she had she resigned in despair to other people. They did the best they could. They could not be beautiful, they were even too flat to be picturesque, so they “caved in” gracefully and made up their minds to be exceedingly respectable. And in time the county became a model county, abounding in model farms, model cottages, model squires, and model people.

There was not a person in the village, where the Rector’s squire reigned, who did not go to church

once every Sunday, most went twice. The black sheep of the village, and he was *very* black indeed, had once, long ago, been seen tipsy. Now Markham, whom the squire lamented, had been a very excellent man, but a most indifferent keeper. He was very timid, the squire kindly said ; cowardly would have been nearer the mark.

The consequence was poaching abounded, and the squire's preserves were always badly stocked, as his friends found out, if he did not, when they came to stay with him for the shooting. The poachers came from a distance, the train brought them, which ran close by, and they returned with well-stocked carpet bags ere yet it was light. They could not be traced, and the railway authorities were loath to interfere, for though they might suspect certain carpet bags, yet many people travel with carpet bags, and it might just chance that they might after all hit upon the wrong ones. So poaching held its own right merrily.

It was to this most respectable village that

Strong and his family came. When Jabez presented himself with a written invitation from the Rector, the squire's heart sank, and he leaned back in his chair startled beyond words, as he looked at his new keeper. Strong was washed clean and well clothed, but no washing could remove the marks in his face that life-long habits had given, nor the cunning of the eyes, nor the villainous expression of the large coarse mouth. The squire clutched at a straw and said,

“ You are the messenger sent on with this note, not the keeper whom I had engaged, and of whom my friend writes here ? ”

“ I be the man his-self,” was the reply, and Jabez smiled a smile meant to be re-assuring, but which so terrified the squire that he turned away from it and soon dismissed the man to his new abode.

But such was the love and trust the Rector inspired, that “ his boy ” made no remonstrance, but put up with Strong even though it was a sore trial

to have to face that respectable county and its inhabitants with their shocked expressions. The poor squire even felt as he walked abroad as if he had been guilty of all the bad doings which had left such tangible marks upon Strong's face.

"It is an ill wind that blows nobody any good," and the black sheep grew so white by comparison that *he* did not grumble at Strong's arrival among them.

But the poachers' day was ended, as they found to their cost. Strong had been a poacher himself, and knew their ways and dodges, and had the greatest satisfaction in overhauling their nets and traps. One night there was a terrific fight between Jabez Strong and four poachers, in which the former came off victorious, not, however, before he had been very roughly handled, but for this he did not care, for justice was dealt out to the poachers, Jabez appearing as a witness for the prosecution. And certainly the villagers were as much afraid of him as the poachers, for any of them would go a

mile out of the way sooner than meet Jabez Strong on a lonely road by night or day. The squire was able to write to the Rector with a clear conscience, to say, in praise of his new keeper, that his friends all said that his preserves were never so well filled as they are now. But for all that, in his heart I think he regrets poor Markham. He did no good as a keeper, but then he was such a respectable man.

The Rector still clings to the hope that Strong may live to be more than respectable. There was an improvement even in a short time, for Sue was allowed to go to school, Strong remarking as he gave the permission, that "Larning didn't seem somehow to make 'em less plucky, and Sue had better get what she could. *He wor a plucky 'un* and he spoke like a book."

Sue was also made to read to him what she had learnt. And his wife clings to the hope, like the old Rector, that the church bell may not always call them in vain to church.

Jabez Strong's most valued possession is a stick —a willow stick whittled as white as hands and constant attention can whittle it. It has the post of honour beside the eight day clock in the keeper's pretty lodge, and often in the evening he takes the stick down and passes his hand many times athwart its smooth surface. His wife knows she dare not interrupt him when he is so employed, and he often sighs as he returns it to its place, generally saying under his breath,

“ He was a plucky 'un, he was.”



CHAPTER XIV.

MILES'S CHOICE.

“Mon premier est le premier de son espèce ; mon second n'a pas de premier ; et mon tout, comment le dirai-je ?”

AT Midsummer of the year of Forbes Dunbar's death, the even tenor of Mr. Forrest's life was once more disturbed. This time it was by a letter from an old uncle of his, Mr. Hubbard, who had spent all his life, nearly, in India, and now wished to settle down, as near as he could to his only relation, his nephew Geoffrey Forrest, and his family. With this intention he purchased a house at Stopford, and being both active and energetic for his years, he furnished and took

possession of it much sooner than Mr. Forrest could have thought such a thing possible. Indeed his arrival followed very closely upon his letter.

The children were upon the river, when he paid his first visit. Mr. Forrest received him in his studio. It was not a year ago that Mrs. Irvine, sitting in that very room, had been so amazed at his youthful appearance. She could not have said the same now. Trouble had brought about in a very short time what years had failed in doing, and Geoffrey Forrest was now an old man.

Mr. Hubbard was a big, stout person, with a quick manner, and an abruptness of speech that was quite startling.

“I haven’t been long in finding you out, nephew. I only came from India on the second, and here I am, bag and baggage. I have bought a house, had it furnished, and am now shaking down in it. It doesn’t do to let the grass grow under one’s feet. Must keep pace with the times, nephew. But

where are my great-nephews and nieces—I hope they are at home?"

"They would have been if they had known you were coming. As it is I am sure they will soon be in. They are gone for a row upon the river; but their tea-hour is five o'clock, and it is near upon that now."

"Very healthy exercise, rowing. I was very fond of it myself when I was a lad. I will stay and have tea with them, then I can make their acquaintance. You look but poorly, nephew. Do you find the heat too much? I'm an old Indian, and seasoned to it, but it's hotter here than in India, or else perhaps it is that the houses in England are only made for a middling temperature, and not for the two extremes of heat and cold."

"I enjoy the heat. It is never too hot for me."

"That is being sensible. But haven't you a more hospitable chair to give me than this one, nephew? It finds my weight too much evidently, and is creaking as if it was breaking down."

Poor Mr. Forrest had been on thorns, and he rose with alacrity to bring forward a large black oak chair with arms. Mr. Hubbard settled himself in it with a sigh of satisfaction. The chair upon which he had been sitting was a fragile looking chair with spidery legs, twisted and intricate, but it was never intended to bear such a heavy weight as Mr. Hubbard.

They talked upon indifferent subjects, Mr. Forrest every now and then glancing wearily from the clock to his open book, wishing the children would come and relieve him of his visitor. Then there was a long pause. Each had finished what he had to say, and Mr. Forrest half closed his eyes, and went off into a dream, which was roughly broken however by the abrupt voice of his uncle.

“ I have something to say, nephew, and I may as well say it to-day, and have it off my mind. I have heard all about you and your children from your cousin, Mrs. Irvine. She says the boys ought to go to school, for it is time the eldest one was

working up for a profession. And she had an idea that you did not send them because you could not afford it. Is that the case?"

Mr. Forrest's face grew cloudy and severe. He certainly could not afford it, but the plain, almost coarse way, in which Mr. Hubbard stated the fact made Geoffrey Forrest wince with pain. He did not answer.

"I conclude your cousin is right," said his uncle, who was watching him narrowly. "Now I am going to make a proposal. I have no kith or kin, save you; I am fairly well off, and when I am gone everything I have will be your children's. But I should like to spend some of it upon them now, and I will undertake the education of the three younger children at any schools you choose for them, upon condition, that you allow me to have one of the elder girls to adopt as my daughter. Now is that a bargain, nephew?"

But Mr. Hubbard had touched the wrong chord. Since Ray's death, Mr. Forrest had been more or

less uneasy about the children. He saw, now, that life could not always glide on for them in the old simple groove in which they had been brought up. He saw that Denys would never be satisfied unless he were the soldier about which he was always talking. And Miles? ah! little Miles. Between his father and him there was a link which bound them closely together, and—well, he could not bear yet to think of parting with Miles; besides, the boy was much younger than Denys, and there would be plenty of time to settle about him later on. But Denys must be sent to school, and Hester too. Enid was talking about her to Janet only the other day, not knowing her father was attending. Janet and Enid both agreed how much better it would be if Hester could be sent to a good school for a few years to find her proper level. She was more than any of them could manage. Janet's authority she set aside, Enid and Cecily she turned into ridicule if they attempted to correct her. Yes, Mr. Forrest was obliged to own that Denys and

Hester must be sent away, and he had been pondering how it could be done. But Mr. Hubbard's offer roused the lion in him: his dreamy eyes flashed with a sudden fire, and standing upright, he threw back his head, with the gesture of a thoroughbred horse, while in his even, slow voice he answered,

“I am very much obliged to you, but poor as I am, I do not sell my children. I shall find ways of providing for them myself. In the meantime I thank you for your offer, as no doubt it was kindly meant.”

“Tut, tut, who talks of selling children? Not I, I am sure. But there am I in a large house that I don't know what to do with, and I only ask you to lend me one of the girls, you have two grown up, to come and stay with me, and be a companion to me in my old age. Well, nephew, I won't say any more now. You think it over, we will talk about it again.”

“There are the children's voices,” said Mr.

Forrest, ringing the bell. "You would like to go to them, I am sure. They always have tea in their own room, but if I had known you were coming—"

"It will be quite good enough for me. I like taking people as they are. I will go at once and make their acquaintance, if you will excuse me, nephew. We shall meet again soon, I hope. Good-bye for the present."

Mr. Forrest most gladly excused him, and the instant the door had shut upon him, he walked to his writing-table and took his pen in hand. Then his eyes ran over the room. In that, and in the two beyond it, the furniture had been collected by him when he was a young man, and including pictures and china, had cost him some thousands of pounds. He had forgotten the exact sum, but something like ten or twelve thousand. The value of many of the things was trebled now, for he had picked them up in out-of-the-way foreign places, one here, another there, and had brought them

home, unbroken, at the cost of infinite labour and care. He had made up his mind, however, in one brief moment, and they must be sacrificed for his children's sake. Only he would keep those articles that had specially belonged to his wife. That chair and couch had been bought for her, and all the things they had purchased together he would not part with, but the rest must go, though it was like parting with a piece of himself, so dear were they to his artistic mind. He sat down at once and wrote the needful letter, perhaps he was afraid if he waited that old habits and associations would be too strong for him ; then sealed it, dropped it into the letter bag, and went out into the wood.

There, among his birds first, and afterwards at his boy's grave, his ruffled spirit was soothed into its usual tranquil calm.

And thus it came about, that the changes in the Old House by the River were great as time passed on. Denys and Hester went to school,

Mr. Hubbard shook down into his house at Stopford. The old gentleman drove over often, but learnt to deal more discreetly with his nephew. Cecily was invited to *stay* with him, by degrees her visits grew longer and more frequent, and then she became almost a visitor in her own home. That left only Mr. Forrest, Enid, and Miles, but Denys and Hester brought schoolfellows home for the holidays, and Cecily contrived either to come to the Old House by the River once a day or to have Enid in to see her at Stopford. Stopford has "gone with the times" too, for it wakened up to the advantage of running a branch railway, and one of the stations being very near the Old House by the River, Enid can get into Stopford in a very few minutes, and pay frequent visits to the old Rector, who wins her love and admiration the more she knows him.

Miles is devoted to his father, and prefers to stay with him, though sometimes he accompanies Enid. Often Denys teases him—and Hes-

ter, but they cannot make him change his ways.

One day, when Mr. Hubbard and Cecily drove over, they were all assembled in Mr. Forrest's studio, now dismantled of most of its art treasures, and Miles, as usual in a corner, was poring over a book.

"Come here, Miles," said his great-uncle suddenly. "You read too much, my boy, and talk too little. One would think you were going to be a monk."

"I am not going to be a monk," said Miles calmly, "but I am going to be a priest."

"And you think that is much the same, I suppose?"

"I shall have father to live with me," said Miles dreamily. "And the very first anthem my choristers sing shall be Ray's anthem."

"What is that?"

And the child raising earnest eyes, and a face that was growing strangely like his brother's,

folded his hands somewhat after the fashion of the little grey saints in the old grey church, as he answered sedately and reverently—

“When I awake up after Thy likeness, I shall be satisfied with it.”



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